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THE LIFE
OF
SAINT BRIDGET,

“The Mary of Erin,”

AND

THE SPECIAL PATRONESS OF THE DIOCESES
OF KILDARE AND LEIGHLIN.

BY AN IRISH PRIEST.



NEW YORK:
PUBLISHED BY P. O'SHEA,
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P R E F A C E .



THIS work has no pretensions to deep historical research. The materials have been found principally in Colgan and Bollandus, and in the original lives edited by them. Other works have been consulted on particular questions, which required more development than could be attained by the perusal of these authors.

It would have been easy to have given the work a learned appearance. Reasons

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might have been assigned for adopting certain opinions, and works might have been cited to sustain them; authorities, not known to the general reader, might have been quoted in every page; but all these have been omitted, as they would tend to impede rather than promote the utility of the book, to those for whom it was originally intended.

The object of the work is to make the history and the virtues of Saint Bridget better known to Irish Catholics. Little can be gleaned from works within their reach about this glorious Saint, whose praises were once the theme of many a

devoted missionary, and whose name was dear to every Irish heart.

It is to be lamented that the lives of our Irish Saints are not better known; for if they were we would be more respected abroad, and more devoted to the interest of that Church which produced them. Nothing is generally known about them beyond the mere fact, that Ireland was once called "The Isle of Saints," and that her sainted missionaries were spread over the entire world.

If this work induce others to make known to the Irish people the lives of some others of the Irish Saints, and if it

tend to stir up a more sincere devotion to Saint Bridget amongst Irish Catholics, the labor spent in its compilation will be most abundantly rewarded.

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THE

LIFE OF SAINT BRIDGET.

CHAPTER I.

HER BIRTH—HER EARLY YEARS—HER EDUCATION.

SAINT BRIDGET was born about the year 453. Her father, Dubtach, was of noble origin, descended from "Con of the Hundred Battles;" her mother, Brothseach, or Brochessa, was descended from the noble house of the O'Connor's; and both reckoned many a noble chief amongst their ancestors. Dubtach availed himself of the customs of the country, and besides his lawful wife he kept a handmaid. He was exceedingly attached to his slave and

handmaid, Brothseach, and he seemed to lavish on her all the affection which belonged to his legitimate wife.

Dr. Lanigan maintains that Brothseach was his lawful wife, and rejects this account of Saint Bridget's parentage as devoid of all foundation. But his reasoning is by no means conclusive, and, however willing to sustain his opinion, we must reject it as being quite improbable.

1° Colgan, Bollandus, Usher, Ware, Harris, and several other writers, either positively maintain that Saint Bridget was illegitimate, or pass the matter over in silence. The silence of such men seems to be a sufficient reason for adopting this opinion without hesitation, as they would not pass the matter over unnoticed, if they had not sufficient grounds for its authenticity. Dr. Lanigan rests altogether on the authority of Cogitosus, who says, that Saint Bridget "was born of noble and Christian parents." But Cogitosus says

nothing beyond this, that would lead us to adopt the opinion of this author. That her parents were of noble birth can be easily admitted; and we know the sad reverses to which the high-born are sometimes subjected. It may be that Brothseach was a distant branch of the O'Connor family, and that her slavery was only a natural consequence of the circumstances in which she was born. It is by no means certain that the parents of Bridget were Christians at the time of her birth; and, granting even that they were, we know from the histories of the Jesuit missions, how very hard it is to induce pagans to adopt the Christian code of morality after their conversion.

2° Those holy men who state, in the lives of Saint Bridget, that she was illegitimate, were, at least, as anxious as any writer of the present day to say nothing of her that would not redound to her honor; and when we find them roundly

asserting that her parents were not married, we must conclude that they were fully convinced of the truth of their statements.

3° It is admitted, on all hands, that her father wished to sell her as a slave to the king of Leinster; and it is almost impossible to conceive how he could have been induced to take this step, if she were his legitimate child. And this argument acquires additional force from the fact, that she seems to have been his only daughter. If we had no other argument but this, it would go very far to show that Bridget was not the legitimate daughter of a nobleman of the fifth century.

All these reasons have induced us to follow the common opinion, and to reject that of Dr. Lanigan, as being unfounded and devoid of authority.

Dubtach disregarded the jealousy of his wife; but she became so importunate, that, in order to preserve peace, he de-

terminated to sell Brothseach at the first opportunity. Brothseach was sold shortly afterwards to a Druid, on condition that he would restore to Dubtach the child which she was then bearing in her womb. He was induced to make this stipulation on account of various predictions regarding her future greatness. Even the pagans foretold that the child of Brothseach would be holy; and that her name would be honored and revered over the entire country.

The Druid, who led a sort of a wandering life, determined to bring his new slave to his native country. He spent some time in the northern parts of Leinster; and on one occasion a pious Christian happened to lodge in the same house with him and Brothseach. This holy man spent the night in prayer; and when a profound silence reigned all around, he saw a globe of fire resting on the head of Brothseach. He related the matter to

the Druid in the morning, and he told him to treat her and her child kindly, as she would be the source of innumerable blessings to him.

They journeyed on until they came to Faugher, a village a few miles from Dundalk; and, in this secluded place, Saint Bridget was born. She was a cause of joy to her tender mother, and a source of deep interest to the Druid.

As soon as Brothseach was able to travel, the Druid turned his steps towards Connaught, his native country; and Saint Bridget spent her early years in this part of Ireland. Several wonderful things are told of her, even during her infancy. A nurse was procured for her, and, most fortunately for Bridget, she was a Christian. She heard of the future greatness of the little infant, and many a pious prayer did she utter, and many a blessing did she invoke on the tender child she bore in her arms.

Bridget was exceedingly delicate. She could bear no solid food on her stomach. She lived on new milk; and, strange to say, she always appeared full of health and vigor. Some of her biographers saw even in this a sign of her future greatness. According to them, she loathed the food procured by the industry of her pagan foster-father, and lived on the milk of a white heifer, which was an emblem of the purity of her soul.

Those who admit the divinity of the Christian religion must admit the existence of miracles; and those who interpret the Scriptures in their clear, obvious sense must admit the continuation of them in the true Church. The gift of miracles is conferred by Almighty God only for some special object; and the object is always worthy of such a power. He has conferred this gift on those holy men who have sacrificed every human comfort to make His gospel known to those who sat

in darkness and in the shadow of death. Hence we find that this gift was very common in the early ages of the Church, and has been conferred on Saint Patrick, and in comparatively modern times on Saint Dominick, Saint Francis Xavier, on the blessed Peter Claver, and on many others who endeavored to propagate the glory of His name. It is foolish—it is impious to deny the existence of miracles, confirmed as they have been in every age, from the days of our Redeemer to our own time.

Saint Bridget was specially raised up by God to propagate the Catholic faith in Ireland; and in accordance with His usual mode of acting, she also received the power of working miracles. Hundreds of them are narrated by her biographers; and for those which we shall relate, we claim no other belief than that which is given to well authenticated facts. It would be hard to prove the authenticity of each and

every one of them; but this is not necessary. It is quite enough for the pious reader to know that those miracles are not impossible; and that they have been related by witnesses worthy of belief, as having been performed by the intercession of Saint Bridget.

When Bridget was yet an infant, a child some few months old died during the night. On the next day when its mother was making preparations for its interment, the nurse brought Bridget to the place where the dead infant was lying. With childlike curiosity she touched the body of the deceased child, and to the joy of the mother, and to the great surprise of all, the child was restored to life.

Bridget spoke at an unusually early age; and the first words she uttered regarded her Heavenly home. She raised her little eyes towards the sky, and said with all the sweetness of childish accents, "This will be mine." This expression was un-

derstood by her fond mother, who one day expected to be freed from her slavery and to enjoy the company of her daughter in the Heaven of the blessed.

Bridget and her mother were very kindly treated by the Druid; and although he was a pagan, still he allowed them to worship their own God after their own manner. It is stated that during the silence of the night he saw three persons clad in white enter the room in which Bridget was sleeping. They approached her cradle, and one of them went through the ceremony of baptism. The Druid was much surprised at this vision; and at their departure one of them told him to call her Bridget, and that she would be much beloved by the Irish people.

As she received the faculty of speech at an early age, all the other faculties of her soul were likewise rapidly developed. Every person who saw her was very much struck by her beautiful appearance, but

still more by that Heavenly something, which hung around her person. There was a something more than flesh and blood, which spoke to the heart and shadowed forth the beauty of the soul within.

Brothseach took a most particular interest in her child, and treasured up every thing she heard of her future greatness. Her nurse was not less anxious about her; and as her intellect became stronger, she told her of Jesus and Mary; and when these sweet names fell on her infant ear, her eye used to brighten, and her infant curiosity should be gratified by hearing more about them. When the nurse spoke of the Infant Jesus, Bridget would listen with the greatest attention and put a thousand childlike questions about His infant days. Then she would speak of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Bridget would listen again; and when she spoke of the beauty and the lovingness and the tenderness of both, Bridget would sometimes say

that she loved them; but when she was told how they both were treated by the world, her little heart would grow sad, and the large tears would drop from her eyes. These impressions were made on her infant mind; and when she was told not to offend them, she anxiously inquired how she could please them; when told, with childlike simplicity she said, I will never do any thing that will offend Jesus and Mary.

In this manner Bridget was taught the Christian doctrine by her nurse and by her mother; and it is thus every pious mother should instil into the minds of her children the same truths. The young mind is susceptible of the finest impressions; and first impressions can never be thoroughly erased from the mind. Persons in after life may deviate from them; but the well educated child shall always remember the instructions of his youth. Parents neglect this duty too often, and

the harsh treatment they sometimes receive from their children is a just punishment for their forgetfulness. But if they implanted in their minds the sound principles of Christian morality, they would have just reason to rejoice in their children; and in turn their children in after years would remember their parents with affection, and thank God for having given them parents who loved and feared Him.

As love is the perfection of the law, the soul that loves God must advance in virtue and sanctity; and hence we find that Bridget was endowed with all the Christian virtues at a very early age. She was exceedingly modest. She loved to retire from before the face of man, and any thing that could wound a modest ear, gave Bridget intense pain. She was mild and gentle in her manners, and most obedient to the will of her mother. She was fond of prayer, and she frequently retired to commune with God. She often thought

of Jesus and Mary, and begged of them to grant her to lead a pure and holy life, that she might enjoy their company in Heaven. In a word, she possessed every virtue which could adorn a child of Mary, or which could endear her to those around her. And as virtue and innocence are the foundations of true and sincere affection, Bridget was beloved by all who had an opportunity of seeing her; and many a fervent prayer ascended to the throne of Jesus in her behalf, from the lips of those who admired the beauty and the virtue of the innocent child.

CHAPTER II.

SHE IS HARSHLY TREATED BY HER STEP-MOTHER—
HER RELATIONS WISH TO GET HER MARRIED—
HER RESISTANCE.

DUBTACH never lost sight of his handmaid nor of her child. He now reminded

the Druid of their former agreement, and demanded Bridget as the object of their former stipulation. This must have been a severe trial to Bridget at such an early age. • She was treated by the Druid as if she had been his own daughter; and she was guided by her mother in the paths of rectitude. But Dubtach insists on his rights; and Bridget goes to the house of her father. Her parting with her mother was heart-rending; but still she must be resigned; she must offer this trial to a loving God as the first fruits of her young and tender heart. The only consolation she experienced was, that she was accompanied by her faithful nurse, who would watch over her, and tend her in the land of the stranger.

Bridget was kindly received by her father. He was pleased with her appearance, and flattered by the accounts he received of her. But Bridget's trials were now only commencing. Her step-mother

gave her a cool and a formal reception; and, as she hated her mother as a rival, she hated her as the offspring of that mother. She put the worst construction on all her actions. Her virtues appeared in the eyes of her step-mother as so many abominable vices; and Bridget's uprightness was a censure on her own depravity. She was obliged to discharge the most menial offices of the household; and being the daughter of a slave, she was treated by her step-mother as the swine which she was obliged to tend.

Dubtach was inclined to be lenient to his daughter: but his wife endeavoured to poison his affections. She wished to see him feel towards Bridget as she felt herself; and she never lost an opportunity to establish her own views by a misconstruction of Bridget's actions.

It seem that her father lived some place in or near Kildare, as appears from several things recorded in the lives of Saint Bridget.

At this time a synod was held in the plain of the Liffey; and a pious old widow obtained permission for Bridget to accompany her to the synod. One of the bishops, Saint Ibar, according to Colgan, had a vision during sleep. He thought that he saw the Blessed Virgin in the midst of the bishops. On the next day when Bridget entered the church, Saint Ibar said, "Behold the blessed virgin, whom I saw in my vision." Bridget's sanctity was well known to many of the fathers; and they all gave God thanks for having sent such a saint amongst them.

Bridget was exceedingly anxious about her mother. Her father was more kindly disposed towards her latterly, having heard of the reception she received at the synod, and of the several wonders she performed. Bridget, relying on his renewed kindness and affection, asked his permission to visit her mother in company with her nurse. To her great joy, she obtained his

permission and sought that mother whom she so tenderly loved. The meeting of the mother and daughter was most affectionate; and the joy of the old Druid was not less sincere. Thousands of inquiries were made about old friends and old acquaintances; and Bridget again felt the happiness of a contented home. Bridget undertook the duties which her mother had to discharge; and as the Druid had large herds of cattle, she had special care of the dairy. She wished to keep everything neat and clean, and she was anxious to give as much satisfaction to the Druid as lay in her power. Few monasteries existed in those days in these parts of Ireland, and consequently the poor were obliged to beg their bread from door to door as they do now-a-days. Sometimes they came to Bridget, and her heart burned to relieve them. She gave them the milk and butter that were under her charge. Hearing of her charity, a great many poor crowded

around her ; and she endeavored to satisfy all. But now the moment of anxiety came. An account must be given to the Druid of the produce of his dairy, and Bridget had given all to the poor. She was very much afflicted, not so much on her own account as on account of her mother, who was accountable to the Druid for the indiscretion of her daughter. Bridget had only one consoler, whom she used to consult in all her difficulties. She prayed most fervently, and begged of God to come to her assistance, and to console her in her trouble. She spent a long time in prayer, and, rising full of confidence, she found that her prayer was heard. What she had given to the poor did not lessen the property of the Druid. God supplied by His power what Bridget had given away in her charity.

The time passed on most agreeably ; those days were days of peace. Bridget thought of the harsh treatment she re-

ceived from her step-mother; but, so far from entertaining any ill feeling towards her, she said a short prayer for her conversion; and thus the remembrance of past injuries was only an occasion of performing a meritorious act.

The Druid became more and more attached to Bridget. He spoke to her of the Christian religion, of its dogmas and its precepts; and he saw in Bridget's life a practical illustration of the precepts of the Gospel. Every thing she said, every thing she did, made a great impression on his mind; and from his serious manner, and from the inquiries he made, it was quite easy to see that the grace of God was working a change in his soul.

When the time of Bridget's departure was drawing nigh, she became more and more uneasy about her mother; and when she remembered the sad days she spent in her father's house, her heart withered within her. A gloomy future appeared

to loom in the distance; when to her great joy, the Druid told her that her mother was free and might accompany her. Her heart was full; her joy was complete; she thanked God for His special favors, and promised to lead a more perfect life for the future as a thanksgiving for this great mercy.

The Druid bade an affectionate farewell to Bridget and her mother, and gave them valuable presents at their departure. The meekness and gentleness of the Christian, exemplified in the devout life of Bridget, made a deep impression on his mind. His belief in the dreamy rites of his own religion was shaken, and, in a short time afterwards, he was converted to the Christian faith and died a pious Catholic.

From her infancy, Bridget was very charitable to the poor. Every thing she could procure was given in charity; and she was now overjoyed to have something to give to these representatives of Him

who had not a place to lay His head. She distributed to the poor all she received from the Druid, before she arrived at her father's house.

After her return, she lived with her father and was treated in the same harsh manner by her step-mother. We are not told what became of her mother by any of her biographers. It is probable that she did not return with Bridget to her father's house, but that she remained somewhere not far distant, in order that she might have an opportunity of speaking occasionally to her daughter.

The step-mother still continued to represent her in the worst colors to her father. She told him that Bridget was squandering his property, and that if a stop were not put to her extravagance she would make beggars of him and his family. Being continually harassed by these misrepresentations, he determined to sell Bridget to the king of Leinster. He took her to

the king's palace, and whilst he was speaking to the king, Bridget gave his sword to a poor person who asked her for an alms. On his return Dubtach became so furious that he would have taken away her life if they had been in a more retired place. This sword had been given him as a mark of special favor by the king, and he considered it more valuable than half his possessions.

However, restraining his rage, he brought her to the king, and in addition to his other charges against her, he related to the king what had just happened. The king asked her why she did so. She answered that she would give the king, her father, and the whole world to Jesus Christ, if she had it in her power. The king was so struck with the answer, that he turned to her father and said, that his whole dominions would not be an equivalent for his daughter; that he should let her have her own way for the future, and

not restrain those extraordinary powers which God had conferred on her. He then gave him another sword still more valuable, as a token of the esteem he had for him and his daughter. Dubtach returned home quite satisfied with the result of his mission; but Bridget was a very unwelcome guest to her step-mother.

As this scheme did not succeed, another soon presented itself to her selfish step-mother. Bridget was now drawing to the state of maturity. She was exceedingly handsome, and it would be a most desirable thing to get her married. A suitable match offered, and her father and brothers were quite anxious that Bridget's consent should be obtained. The matter was broached to her by her father. Bridget was quite astonished at such a proposal, as she imagined that she was still regarded by all as a child. Her father pressed the matter, but Bridget still refused. She loved her Jesus, and resolved to do all in

her power to please Him. She heard of those devout virgins who spent their lives in solitude and prayer; and she resolved to imitate their example,—to consecrate her virginity to God.

She made known her intentions to her father, but he and his sons could not understand such things. They imagined that such people showed by their acts a want of the ordinary dictates of common sense, and that *they* should not be pointed at by the finger of scorn, as abettors of such conduct. It is stated that one of her brothers, who was a particular favorite of his mother, in attempting to strike her, was chastised by the Divine vengeance for presuming to injure His chosen spouse. These were sad days for poor Bridget. She spent her time in prayer, and many a bitter tear rolled down her cheeks, which told but too well the harshness of the treatment to which she was subjected. She had no friend to console her but her

Jesus; and He gave her more consolation in her moments of distress than she could obtain from all creatures. Some of her biographers state that her face became quite disfigured by the loss of one of her eyes, which was afterwards restored at her profession as a nun. However this may be, it is quite certain that she was freed from the persecution of her relatives and obtained permission to consecrate her virginity to God. Oh! vain are the ways of men when opposed to the ways of God.

CHAPTER III.

HER PROFESSION—HER FIRST CONVENT—HER
MIRACLES.

ALTHOUGH Bridget never for a moment despaired of obtaining the consent of her relatives to consecrate her virginity to God; still when she obtained their per-

mission, a new life seemed to be infused into her soul. Her first act was one of thanksgiving to God for having relieved her from the torments to which she was subjected ; and she again and again renewed her former promises of attachment and love.

Bridget was anxious to make the final step ; to make an entire consecration of herself to God. She lived a most holy life from her infancy ; but now she became more fervent as the time of her profession drew nigh. She made known her intentions to some young persons of her own age, and they all wished to see that happy day, when they would be God's and God's alone.

All matters being finally arranged, she and three other young girls left father, and mother, and friends, and every thing which this world holds dear, and directed their steps to the holy bishop, Saint Mac-caille. It seems that he was staying at

this time at Ussny Hill, county Westmeath; and here Bridget and her companions made their vows. This holy bishop had heard frequently of Bridget's sanctity, and of the many wonders she performed; and now when he found that he was destined to receive her vows, his joy was most unbounded.

On the next day Bridget and seven others presented themselves at the altar to receive the veil. Saint Maccaille presided, and he placed a white veil on her head, and gave her a white mantle or habit; fit emblems of the purity of her bright and unspotted soul. He told her that the whiteness of her dress would always remind her of her profession and of her fervor and devotedness on that happy day. This was the dress of the Irish nuns for some centuries after the time of Saint Bridget.

When Bridget was making her vows she touched one of the wooden steps of the

altar; and immediately it became fresh and green. It preserved this freshness ever afterwards; and on one occasion when the church was burned, and all the wood of which it was composed was consumed, this step remained uninjured. Cogitosus relates it as a fact quite visible to all in his own time, and regards it as a lasting memorial of the sanctity of Bridget and of the Divine approbation of the step she had taken.

It is probable that Bridget was professed about the sixteenth or seventeenth year of her age, in accordance with the ordinary discipline of the Church at this period, and not in her fourteenth year, as Hector Boethus asserts. The ceremony took place about the year 469, and most probably before the death of Saint Patrick—most probably, as the precise time of his death is not quite certain.

Some say that he died in 458, and others say that he lived till the year 493. There

is some authority for both these dates, and in order to make the matter more clear, we shall state the arguments on both sides.

Cambrensis and Nennius say that Saint Patrick died in 458; but we shall see hereafter that this person was different from our Irish Apostle.

Dr. Lanigan says that Saint Patrick died in 465. He reasons thus: Saint Benignus died in 468; and it is quite certain that he succeeded Saint Patrick in the See of Armagh. Usher admits this; but he says that Saint Patrick resigned this see shortly after its foundation, and that Benignus was Bishop of Armagh during the lifetime of Saint Patrick. But Dr. Lanigan says there seems to be no foundation for this assertion; nay, the prophecy of Saint Patrick would imply the contrary. Hence Saint Patrick must have died before 468; and as it is admitted on all hands that he died on Wednesday, the 17th of March,

by referring to the calendar we find that the 17th of March fell on Wednesday in the year 465; and consequently we may conclude that Saint Patrick died in this year.

Usher, Ware, and Colgan, relying on the authority of Jocelin, the Annals of the Four Masters, and on several other documents, say that Saint Patrick died in 493. The 17th of March fell on a Wednesday also in this year. The Four Masters say that the See of Armagh was founded in 458—that Saint Benignus, Bishop of Armagh, died in 468, and that Saint Patrick, died in 493. They also state that Sen-Patrick died in 458, which clearly shows that, in their opinion, he was a person different from Saint Patrick. The Tripartite and the Scholiast of Saint Fiech mention Sen-Patrick as being a person distinct from our Saint. Dr. Lanigan rejects the computation of Cambrensis. On the other hand, the Four Masters clearly show that

Saint Patrick did resign the See of Armagh, and, consequently, the grounds on which he rests for support are completely cut away. His reasoning on this, as well as on several other points, is far from being as calm and dispassionate as could be expected. He has too much disregard for the authority of those who disagree with him; and it seems that the opinion of Usher, on this point, is much better sustained. That there are some difficulties against it, cannot be denied; but, even in spite of those, we adopt it, as being much more probable, and much more consistent with the statements of our ancient annalists.

It was necessary to make this digression, in order to do justice to our narrative. Several interviews are related by the biographers of Saint Patrick and Saint Bridget as having taken place between them. If Saint Patrick died in 465, as Dr. Lanigan asserts, Bridget would then have been only about twelve years of age, and we should

reject all these as spurious: if he lived till 493, as appears far more probable, then these transactions may have taken place. We shall select from the different things that have been related such as will tend to illustrate the history of Saint Bridget.

Jocelin, in his Life of Saint Patrick, says that Saint Bridget fell into a deep sleep on one occasion, when she was listening to Saint Patrick preaching. Saint Bridget may have been very young at the time, as no date has been assigned. During sleep Saint Bridget had a vision—"she saw a collection of persons clothed in white, and every thing around them was in white—the fields, the corn, nay, the very cattle and beasts of burden. This whiteness soon passed away, and the same objects were seen again; but now they were all stained and spotted. Even these disappeared, or rather changed into a dark blackness. And lastly she saw, as it were,

a great field, in which were dogs and wolves, and swine and sheep; and they were all set against each other in fearful rage and discord." She related this vision to Saint Patrick, who explained it to the people as foreshadowing the various stages of the Irish Church. The first ages of the Irish Church were pure and white; then a little darkness, then the blackness of heresy; and finally the pure doctrine side by side with the doctrines of Luther and Calvin.

When Bridget became a nun, her joy was full; she had attained the most anxious wish of her heart; God was now her inheritance; and His honor and His glory were now the sole object of her life. All her companions felt equally happy; all were equally devoted. They looked on Bridget as being specially sent by God to rule over them, and to lead the way by her bright example. They wished to live near her; they wished to live with her;

they wished to confide in her as their guide; they wished to live under her as their mother.

In the early ages of the Church, consecrated virgins lived with their friends, and discharged the ordinary duties of the household. Afterwards it was found more desirable that they should live in community. But the strict enclosure was a thing of much later date, and was introduced gradually into religious houses. It is needless to say how much it has conduced to promote the sanctity of these holy institutions. In the first ages of Christianity in Ireland, circumstances did not warrant the strict enclosure, nay, it was not enforced in any part of the Church; and, consequently, Bridget and her companions lived in community, under a certain rule, without being bound to remain within the precincts of their convent.

Bridget's first house was established at Bridget's Town, or Ballyboy, not far from

Ussny Hill, under the care of Saint Maccaille. Bridget had the management of the house, and all submitted to her most cheerfully, although many of them were much older. But no person could doubt of her fitness. Every one spoke of the miraculous cures she effected; and a series of miracles put her sanctity beyond the possibility of doubt. But independent of power of working miracles, she was well suited to govern a community. She was exceedingly sweet and gentle. Her prudence was proverbial; and sound sense regulated all her actions. She was exact without being severe. She reproved without offending. She kept all in order, without making any body feel the humiliation of subjection.

The nuns were supplied with everything which they required by the good bishop and by their charitable neighbors. On more than one occasion when there were no provisions in the house, they were

miraculously procured by the prayers of Saint Bridget. No poor person ever left the convent gate without an alms. No weary traveller ever asked a place in the strangers' hall, and was refused. Peace and charity reigned in this small community; and it became so celebrated that hundreds demanded admission into this asylum. The poor flocked around the good sisters, and a little town was soon gathered around the convent.

Saint Bridget had great power over evil spirits, as the following incident shall prove. On one occasion a person possessed by the Devil was brought to her. His friends gave him no intimation whatsoever of where they were conducting him. On a sudden he exclaimed, "I will not go with you—you are bringing me to Saint Bridget, who is now at such a place." His friends pressed him to go forward; but he cast himself upon the ground and became quite furious. Not

being able to prevail on him to accompany them, one of them went to Saint Bridget, and begged of her to come and free this poor man from the evil spirit. When she arrived the Devil fled; and the poor man returned home thanking God for the benefit He conferred on him by the prayers of the saint.

Saint Bridget was very charitable to the poor. She always endeavored to relieve their wants. She often gave them the food which had been prepared for the community; she even gave them the clothes which she was actually wearing. She gave her girdle to a poor woman, who cured sundry diseases with it; and ever afterwards she was not only not obliged to beg, but she even amassed a great deal of money, which she distributed in charity; and she died a most edifying death.

Saint Maccaille used to visit the convent frequently. On one occasion he ex-

pounded the eight beatitudes for the nuns. When he had finished, Saint Bridget said to them, "Let each of us select some one beatitude, and let her make it the special virtue of her life." All of them expressed their acquiescence, and requested Bridget to choose one: She selected mercy; and she was ever afterwards most anxious to reduce it to practice.

She was visited by a great many holy persons, both lay and clerical, and she was always most anxious to occupy the time in speaking of heavenly things. She wished to acquire information from those who were more learned than herself; and she was always most thankful for information on spiritual subjects. She had a happy manner of introducing topics of this kind; and when she found that the person was not anxious to speak on them, she turned the conversation quietly to something else.

She loved to speak to the poor, and to

instruct them in the duties of their religion. She told them to be resigned, to lead lives of virtue, and that a bright Heaven shone beyond the grave. By her sweet words their lot seemed not half so desperate as they imagined. If a poor pagan came to her, then she was all charity to gain over this poor soul, to add one more to the body of Christ's Church. She took the greatest interest in little children, and she treated them with such kindness and tenderness that they loved to be with her. Thus the saints live. They spend their precious time in laying up treasures for Heaven; and every day adds a something to their reward. They move amongst their fellow-men and in the centre of the busy crowd; but their minds are fixed on God; and acts of love and sorrow are as numerous as the pulsations of their hearts. They seem to be absorbed in worldly cares, but the spirit within is above the dross of earth; it is elevated to that

God who gives them strength to despise the world and to abandon all for His dear sake.

CHAPTER IV.

SHE VISITS VARIOUS PARTS OF IRELAND—HER MIRACLES.

THE fame of Saint Bridget's convent was soon spread far and wide, and her miracles were multiplied every day. She was invited by several of the bishops to visit them in their respective dioceses, probably to establish new houses of her order or to make arrangements to that effect. She visited Saint Mel in Ardagh, and spent some time with him, conversing on various religious subjects.

Some say that Saint Bridget received the veil from this holy man; and the close intimacy which existed between them might have led them into this mistake. Mel was

a Briton by birth, and although some say he was a bishop before he came to Ireland, it is much more probable that he was raised to the episcopacy by Saint Patrick. He was Bishop of Ardagh, and had a famous monastery under his charge. He was well versed in the sacred sciences; and Saint Bridget consulted him on several questions regarding the higher stages of the spiritual life. She never failed to acquire ascetical knowledge, and she never lost an opportunity of reducing it to practice.

As was stated already, Bridget received the power of working miracles, principally to promote the spread of the Gospel; and God, who conferred the power, furnished opportunities for its exercise.

During her stay with Saint Mel, the King of Longford gave a great banquet to his friends and retainers. One of the servants, in removing a very large vase, which the king highly valued both for its antiquity and its expensiveness, let it fall,

and it was shattered into a thousand pieces. The king ordered his officers to cast him into prison and to hand him over on the next day to the executioner. Saint Mel, hearing of this cruel sentence, did all in his power to induce the king to revoke his decree, but without effect. Then remembering the great power of Saint Bridget, and knowing what great consequences might follow on this occasion from a manifestation of the Divine power, he ordered the fragments of the vase to be brought to her. Confiding in the justice of her cause, she prayed that God would exhibit His power and free this poor man from the rigors of the unjust sentence which was impending over him. On the next morning the vase was presented to the king, who was much astonished at the miracle. It had the desired effect. It gave the faithful further confidence in their God, and produced several conversions amongst the pagans.

We have seen what great power she exercised over evil spirits, and how submissive they were to her commands. She visited Bridget of Kilbride, who was at this time in Ardagh, and, when they were sitting down to their repast, Saint Bridget said to her, "I see the Devil sitting at the table." Bridget looked around, and could not see him. Then Saint Bridget made the sign of the cross on her eyes, and she saw him immediately. Saint Bridget then asked the evil spirit why he remained in that house. He answered, "I always remain near this person on account of her sloth." She then commanded him to depart, and the person whom he tormented ever afterwards led a most holy life.

The ceremonies of the Catholic Church are full of mystic meaning: they all tend to fill the soul with devotion. We require something sensible to stir up our sluggish nature; and the Church, directed by the same God who gave us this human nature,

has made use of various ceremonies to draw us to worship her Heavenly spouse. Some of her grandest ceremonies are performed during Holy Week, when she weeps over the death of her dearly beloved; and when she endeavors to draw her children from the things of this world, by fixing their thoughts on their dying God. The Catholic heart alone can feel their meaning, the Catholic heart alone can sympathize with its Jesus; and, the more devoted the heart, the more sincere the sympathy. Bridget entered fully into the mystic meaning of these ceremonies, and every thing that reminded her of Jesus was performed with the greatest love.

She visited one of the churches of Ardagh on Holy Thursday, and some women, probably religious, who were attached to the church, were disputing with each other to know who would wash the feet of the sick on that festival. Saint Bridget was only too happy to perform this work of

mercy. She went through the ceremony with as much care as if she were washing the feet of our Divine Redeemer; and, as a testimony of His love, He restored to health one of those who were washed by the hands of Bridget.

Besides curing sundry diseases, she made the mute to speak and the deaf to hear. She was staying with a pious family, and during the day all happened to be absent but a deaf and dumb child. A poor person came to ask an alms and Bridget turned to the child to inquire for the keys. The child told her where they were, and went to bring them. When his friends returned, they were surprised to hear him speaking, for he had been dumb from his infancy, and never gave any indication of being able to speak at any period of his life.

Bridget was often forewarned of the approach of friends. She and her companions were travelling on a very hot

day in summer, when they met a man and his wife carrying very heavy burdens. Moved with compassion, she gave them the horses which were drawing her own vehicle, and seated herself by the wayside with her companions. She told them to dig a little under the surface, and they would find a well of fresh water. After digging some few feet, they found a beautiful well. In a short time after, one of the neighboring chiefs was passing by with several men and horses, and having heard of the charitable act of Saint Bridget, he gave her two horses instead of those she had given to the poor man. Shortly afterwards some of Saint Patrick's disciples came up greatly fatigued and exhausted from the heat of the day. They were very much refreshed by the water which Saint Bridget had miraculously procured for their use.

These are merely a few of the miracles performed by Saint Bridget during her stay

with Saint Mel in Ardagh. They had most beneficial effects on the newly-converted Christians, and caused also a great many conversions amongst the pagans. The fruit of these miracles was lasting,—the harvest was gathered in before the winter,—the faith was firmly planted,—and, when heresy came with all its' baits and allurements, the prayers of Bridget defended the Irish against its baneful influence. In order to root up the true faith, the stranger should be imported with his gáangrene of heresy, and endeavor to destroy the fruit which had been brought to maturity by the prayers of so many Irish saints.

Saints Mel and Melcu accompanied Saint Bridget to the synod which was held at Tailten (probably Teltown, county Meath). Saint Patrick and several other Irish bishops were assembled there, as grave charges were brought against one of their body. A woman accused Bronus,

a bishop and a disciple of Saint Patrick, of being the father of the child she bore in her arms. The bishop, like another Athanasius, indignantly denied the charge; but the woman still persisted in maintaining the truth of her assertion. At the request of Saint Patrick, Bridget took the woman aside, and asked her who was the father of the child. She said again and again Bronus was its father. Saint Bridget then made the sign of the cross on her mouth, and immediately her head became frightfully swollen. She then made the sign of the cross on the mouth of the child, and he exclaimed, "Bronus is not my father, but such a man," whose name he mentioned, and who was present on the occasion. The woman, confounded at those words pronounced by the lips of her child, acknowledged her guilt, admitted that she accused the bishop wrongfully, and that the person whose name the child mentioned was its father.

Bronus was acquitted of the charge, and ever afterwards preserved a warm affection for Saint Bridget.

When the synod was over, Saint Patrick told her that a priest should accompany her for the future. He ordained Nathfroic, and appointed him as her chaplain. He always accompanied Saint Bridget on her journeys, and lived in Kildare for several years. He used to read for the nuns during dinner, and after leading a most perfect life, he died a most holy death, and is honored as a saint on the Irish calendar.

It is almost impossible to arrange the facts of her life in chronological order. They are differently arranged by her biographers ; but, when we remember the object we have in view, it will not make any material difference, provided the narrative is sufficiently clear to make known the leading events of her life.

After her visit to Ardagh, she seems to

have spent a good deal of time in the eastern parts of Ulster; and she had several opportunities of meeting Erin's great apostle. Their conversation generally turned on religious topics, and the hours seemed as moments in this delightful conversation. Bridget was to Saint Patrick what Scholastica was to Saint Benedict, and she placed as much confidence in him as she would place in a brother. And indeed Bridget and Patrick were not less anxious to promote the conventual system in Ireland, than Scholastica and Benedict were to promote it in Italy. They were all filled with the Divine Spirit, and their hearts were ever engaged in promoting the interests of their Heavenly Master. If the two latter gave rules to their communities, the two former prepared many a fervent soul to receive those rules, and to rival their teachers in the greatness of their sanctity.

Great crowds flocked to hear St. Pat-

rick preach. They loved to hear him, as "he spoke as one having power," and Saint Bridget always listened to him with the greatest attention. On one occasion Saint Patrick was preaching to a vast crowd, and during the sermon they saw a cloud come near the place where they were standing. It moved away gradually, and rested on the hill of Downpatrick. Bridget explained this apparition to the crowd as foreshadowing the death of Saint Patrick and his final resting-place.

Some time afterwards, she accompanied Erc, Bishop of Slane, to Munster. The object of her journey was the same as that she had in view when she visited Saint Mel. She was anxious to establish new convents, and to give all an opportunity of consecrating their virginity to God. As they were journeying on, she said to the bishop: "There is a battle now being fought in the south, and your friends are put to flight." The bishop asked Bridget

to grant him to see the battle also. Erc saw the battle, and on a sudden he cried out: "Two of my brothers are slain." The result proved that what he had seen was really the fact.

She accompanied the bishop to a synod which was held in the territory of Magh-Femyn, a country lying between Cashel and Clonmel; and he pronounced a grand panegyric on her great sanctity. When the people heard of the presence of Saint Bridget amongst them, several came to her to beg of her to visit their friends who were lying dangerously ill. The bishops would not permit Bridget to visit their houses, which were infected with the pestilence, but they told these persons to bring the sick to her. Numbers of sick were carried to Bridget, and she cured them of sundry diseases.

She and her companions lived for some years near the sea, probably at Kilbride, a small village a few miles from Tramore

in the county Waterford. A holy anchoret lived in an island not far from Saint Bridget. He obtained her blessing when going to the island, and by her prayers he was relieved from the proximity of a family that attempted to settle on the island. It is probable that Saint Bridget left a community after her in this place. A church was afterwards built here and dedicated to her honor, and the people about this district had a most special devotion towards her. These lasting memorials attest the faith and devotion of those who very often expended their temporal substance in raising temples to God, or in decorating the shrines of His saints.

CHAPTER V.

**SHE VISITS LIMERICK AND CONNAUGHT—SHE RETURNS
TO KILDARE.**

BEFORE the Christian religion was promulgated there seem to have been two classes of men recognized in society; free-men and slaves. This distinction was not merely conventional. The one regarded the other as beings of an inferior order, differing not only in their social position, but even in their very nature. Christianity removed this barbarous distinction, and pronounced man and master equally endowed by God, and equally subject to His laws. Slavery existed in Ireland in its worst forms at the introduction of Christianity. The Church labored from the beginning to abolish it; and when she was not able to accomplish this end, she labored to mitigate its horrors. Saint

Bridget had the greatest compassion for these poor slaves; and when she could not obtain their manumission, she endeavored to console them by the forbearing principles of the Christian religion. They often fled to her for protection, and she often procured their liberty by her miraculous power.

During her stay in Limerick a female slave fled to her for protection. She was pursued by her mistress, who insisted on her rights, and demanded her as being her property by the laws of purchase. Bridget pleaded earnestly for her liberation; but her mistress becoming excited, took her by the arm. The slave clung to Saint Bridget, but the mistress dragged her away violently. She had not gone far with her prize when her hand fell dead by her side. Terrified at this sudden calamity she returned to Saint Bridget bewailing her misfortune, and begging of her to restore the use of her hand. She

promised to set the slave at liberty if she granted her request. Saint Bridget was overjoyed to have it in her power to cure this pagan matron, as it might be the cause of her conversion, as she was still more rejoiced to be able to obtain the freedom of the poor slave. She made the sign of the cross over her hand, and it was immediately cured. The poor slave thanked Saint Bridget again and again, and requested to be admitted amongst her followers. Bridget granted her request; and the poor slave ever afterwards led a most fervent life.

The kings of those days had a great deal of arbitrary power, and life and death depended on their nod. We find Saint Bridget continually interceding for poor culprits, and very often obtaining their pardon by her miraculous power.

A certain person was detained in chains by the king, and some of his friends came to Saint Bridget and entreated her to ob-

tain his pardon. Bridget, very much moved by their touching appeal, went to the king's palace; and not finding him, she was speaking to some of his friends about the liberation of this man, when she saw harps lying at one side of the room. She asked the persons with whom she was speaking to play on the harps. They replied that they could not. One of the by-standers told them to take up the harps, and that Bridget would supply by her power what they wanted in skill. They seated themselves before the harps, drew their fingers across the strings, and to their great surprise the music was most enchanting. In the meantime the king returned, and hearing this beautiful music, he entered the hall, and to his surprise he found his friends playing on the harps. Upon inquiry he found that Bridget was the secret cause of this extraordinary performance. Seizing this favorable opportunity, she laid her petition before the king. The prison doors were

flung open, and the poor captive once more enjoyed that liberty which is so dear to man.

Bridget performed several other miracles during her visit to Limerick, all tending to the same end, all tending to strike the pagan with the greatness of that God, who weighs the universe on His fingers and regulates its laws for the manifestation of His greater glory.

Bridget next directed her steps to the country of the Labrathi in southern Leinster. Colgan says it was the same as Hy-Kinsellagh, which embraced Wexford, Carlow, and the southern parts of Kilkenny and the Queen's County. It is not known in what part of it she resided.

Bridget was well known to the people of Kildare, and they took a special interest in her, as she was, properly speaking, a native of their own country. She received great quantities of presents of all kinds, and the donation was no sooner made

than it was distributed amongst the poor and indigent.

On one occasion, some persons, who lived at a great distance from the place in which Saint Bridget was then residing, brought with them a great many presents, which they intended to offer her. The night having fallen before they came to their journey's end, they lost their way in a wood, and the night was so dark that they were afraid to proceed. Bridget, who got no intimation of their coming, told the sisters to prepare for some guests. On a sudden, the travellers saw a bright light shining in the distance, and following the direction in which it pointed, arrived safely at the convent. They were hospitably entertained, and, on their return, they were quite surprised to find that they escaped so many pitfalls which lined both sides of the road they had travelled.

Bridget had not seen her parents for a long time. She was anxious to visit them,

both to pay them that mark of respect as being due to them, and to make them more fervent in the service of God. Her father, Dubtach, was delighted to see her. He was naturally proud of such a daughter, and her prayers had wrought a most salutary change in his heart. There is no mention made of her mother; whether it was that she was dead, or did not live with her father, as before insinuated, is not certain. It is said, in the third life, that she went to visit her parents, which would imply that they both were living; but afterwards, in speaking of her father and of his house, there is no mention made of her mother. This furnishes an additional proof of the account we gave of her parentage.

It is stated that she was aroused from her sleep three times by an angel, during the first night she slept at her father's. At the third time, she was told to awaken her father, that the house was beset by

robbers, and that, if defensive measures were not taken, they would all be murdered. She awakes her father, and he finds the house beset by an armed band. All were roused up; doors and windows were barred; and every thing put in order for a regular defence. When the robbers found that they would be resolutely opposed, they retired.

On the next day, one of her nuns said to Saint Bridget, I wish that the angels would always forewarn you when we should be in danger. Bridget told her that she had frequent visits from these Heavenly messengers; that she had several supernatural illuminations; and that she was often apprised by Heavenly visions when the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was being offered up at Rome and other places; and that she assisted at it with as much devotion as if she were present. It is hard for us, weighed down as we are by worldly cares, to conceive how God favors

those pious souls which are wholly devoted to His service.

After spending some time with her father, she visited Connaught, and she seems to have spent most of her time in Roscommon. This was probably the place in which she spent her early days, and she was anxious to visit old friends, and to exhort many of her early acquaintance to lead a more perfect life. By her exertions, several convents were erected, and hundreds of young ladies entered into them to spend their lives in prayer and contemplation.

It would seem, from the manner in which Saint Bridget visited the several parts of Ireland, that her mission was the complement of Saint Patrick's. He sowed the good seed; it budded, and blossomed, and ripened; and then Saint Bridget came towards the end of his mission to gather the fruit into places of safety. The one sowed, the other came when the harvest

was ripe; the one watered with tears, the other gathered with joy; the one passed on to enjoy his reward, when the other culled the most blooming flowers to decorate his festive offering on the day of his departure. Oh! how wonderful are the ways of God! and how beautifully does He arrange the actions of men!

Bronus never forgot the interposition of Bridget at the synod of Tailten. He preserved a vivid recollection of the great benefit conferred on him, and he never lost an opportunity of expressing his gratitude. He paid her a visit, and promised again and again to remember her in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, as often as he assisted at the altar. This was the best return he could make, and it was more esteemed by Bridget than if he made thousands of presents of gold and silver. When he held his Jesus in his hands, he prayed for his kind benefactress; and Jesus heard those prayers, of

ferred with so much love and so much gratitude.

The inhabitants of Leinster now began to feel uneasy at the absence of Bridget. They said that she visited the greater part of Ireland, founded convents and established religious communities, whilst she neglected, in a great measure, her native country, and those who had naturally the first claims on her charity. The matter was now taken up warmly, and a deputation of respectable men was selected and sent to Connaught to bring Bridget back to Kildare. She was indifferent in what part of the country she might dwell, provided she advanced the interests of Him whom she so tenderly loved. She parted from friends with sorrow when duty called; but she was never known to repine at the will of Providence.

When the deputation made known to her the object of their journey, Bridget immediately expressed her readiness to com-

ply with their request. She had a special love for the friends of her youth, and was most anxious to afford them an opportunity of leading a holy life. No delay was made beyond what was necessary to make preparations for their journey, and to secure fit and proper persons to take care of the house in which she was then residing.

Some may think it strange to see Saint Bridget hearkening to the voice of her relatives. It seems not to be consistent with the perfection of the religious state. This is true, when the affection for relatives is not well ordered. A religious should sacrifice every affection to the discharge of her duty. When duty commands, and when flesh and blood stand in its way, in such a case our friends are our greatest enemies. They in reality prevent us from doing what God commands. But when affection for relatives does not clash with the duties of a religious, it is not to be censured. God gave us these finer feel-

ings, and all are given for our advantage. We see how attached our Redeemer was to some of His friends. He could not exhibit greater signs of affection. And shall we condemn what He has taught by His example? Shall we attempt to tread a more perfect way than the way He has trodden before us? We should love our relatives and friends, and we should turn this affection to our mutual advantage. When a religious treats her nearest friends with coldness when they should be treated with kindness, these persons form erroneous notions of religion, and perhaps dissuade others from entering convents. Religious should endeavor to make every thing easy; and a great sweetness should rule over all their actions. Hence, we find Saint Bridget acceding to the request of her friends. It did not interfere with her other obligations; and by this condescension she drew many a heart more

closely to God, and made it feel more tenderly towards religion.

They moved on towards the south, and arrived at Athlone. Here the broad and lordly Shannon rolled on his mighty waters to the sea, and opposed no ordinary obstacle to their progress. Boats must be procured, as no bridge spanned the river at this period; and after making several inquiries, no boats could be obtained. Some of the nuns had seen Saint Bridget perform wonderful things, and they were quite certain that they could pass over safely under her protection. Some of them advanced into the river, calling on Saint Bridget to protect them. Seeing their faith, and the sneer of contempt and disbelief of some pagans who were standing by, she called on the God of Hosts to extend His arm, and protect those who confided in His mercy. The virgins advance slowly, but full of faith, and the sneer and scoff are gone. Every step gave

them new courage, and now the opposite bank is gained in safety.

The priests and laymen who were with Saint Bridget procured a boat; and before they left the bank they told her that there was room for one person in the boat. Bridget turned to one of her nuns, who was particularly timid, and told her to enter the boat. She did so; but they had not advanced many perches from the bank when the boat was upset, and the whole party were thrown into the river. The poor timid nun was the most helpless of all; but she obtained Saint Bridget's blessing before she entered the boat, and she was sure that God would protect her. She arrived safely on the opposite bank, and her clothes were perfectly dry, which surprised the bystanders still more.

They continued their journey and arrived safely in Kildare. During this long tour through Ireland, which must have occupied ten or fifteen years, Saint Bridget

lost none of her wonted fervor. The salvation of her soul and her advancement in virtue, always demanded her first care and occupied her thoughts before every other duty. She knew that the esteem of men would not save her; she knew that the applause and censure of this world would vanish as the flower of the valley; she knew that attention to the spiritual wants of others very often makes us forgetful of our own; she knew that it is much easier to build convents and establish new religious houses, than to arrive at the summit of perfection, and that those who are most zealous for the one are very often most remiss in the other; and hence, in the midst of all her external employments, she never neglected to cultivate those virtues which make the soul dear to God, and which secure His friendship. She prayed; she fasted; she avoided every thing that would in any way endanger her virtue. She did not rely on

past favors or on her past sanctity. She always took such precautions as sound sense, prudence, and religion dictate.

By these means she became more and more holy. She advanced in virtue and holiness, and laid up treasures in Heaven, which the rust nor moth doth not consume. She is a bright star, which points out the way, especially to those who, like her, have abandoned father and mother for God's sake and have bound themselves by vows to spend their days in His service. They have made the first step, their footing is secure, but, like Saint Bridget, they must not rest satisfied with this; they must still work on and imitate the virtues of their great patroness. Many have done so already, and many are still walking in her footsteps, who will one day enjoy the society of Saint Bridget in the land of the blessed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONVENT OF KILDARE—ITS BISHOP—ITS
CHURCH.

SAINT BRIDGET was received with the greatest demonstrations of joy by the people of Kildare. They vied with each other in exhibiting marks of love and respect towards her. They regarded her coming as a special blessing, the harbinger of many a special favor.

A place was soon selected for the site of a convent; and amidst the blessings of the poor, she founded the most famous of her convents, about the year 487. It was situated in the centre of a beautiful country. As far as the eye could reach, rich and luxuriant pasture lands extended. The blue mountains in the distant varied the appearance of the landscape; and wood and water, hill and dale, made it

a most lovely spot for retirement and contemplation.

Near the convent grew a large oak tree, which had been blessed by Saint Bridget. It remained for centuries after her death, and small bits of it were taken away as mementoes of the saint, who spent so many days beneath its shade. Kildare derived its name from this famous oak. Killdara means the cell of the oak. The glories of this old place have passed away; but the shadow of its ancient splendor still hangs around its walls, and gives it a beauty in our eyes, which far surpasses the splendor of the gilded dome or the towering pyramid. It was the scene of the actions of one of our greatest saints. It is hallowed ground, and will always be held sacred by those who revere the memory of departed worth.

Saint Bridget and her companions commenced putting the place in order. At the commencement they were supplied

with what was merely necessary; they were compelled to live on meagre fare, and to be satisfied with indifferent accommodation. But these things gave these pious females no trouble. They were engaged in a good work and the result would recompense them for any privations they might endure. There seems to have been a small portion of land attached to the convent for the support of the nuns; but their chief means of subsistence was the charity of the well-disposed.

By degrees the convent was enlarged; and this was absolutely necessary on account of the large numbers that applied for admission. Persons came from all parts of the country to visit this celebrated seat of piety. Saints and bishops came to beg new foundations, and to converse with Saint Bridget on holy things. Nobles came to pay their respects to her and to obtain her blessing for their infant children. Young ladies came and begged to

be admitted amongst the followers of Saint Brigdet. The old and the decrepid came to spend a few days in peace and to prepare for a happy eternity. The poor came to be fed and clothed; and the weary traveller to obtain shelter from the drizzling rain and the piercing blast.

Of course it was quite impossible to find accommodation for all, and consequently a new town soon sprung up around the convent. In a short time it became the chief town of the province of Leinster. Kings vied with each other in bestowing privileges on this rising town. It was made a city of refuge, and all who were once admitted within its precincts were safe from their pursuers or persecutors. This must have been regarded as a great boon at this period, when private individuals took the law in a great measure into their own hands and took summary satisfaction on the offending party. Sometimes whole families were involved in

private quarrels and bloodshed, on account of the rashness of an individual. But when a person fled to a city of refuge, he was free from the rage of his pursuer. If he were guilty of the supposed crime, he was compelled to make legal compensation; if he were not guilty, he returned to his family under the protection of the laws. Cities of refuge existed in Judea before the preaching of Christianity; and those who clung to the pagan altars were perfectly secure. The Christian Churches were still more sacred, and as the guilty often fled to them, when pursued, they were under the protection of the altar. After some time this privilege was extended to the precincts of the church, and finally to the town in which the church was erected. The fugitive was sacred by the sacredness of the church; and when society saw the advantages obtained by this privilege, it was gradually extended to the town. These

places of refuge have long since ceased to exist; the laws are better administered now, and there is much greater security for person and property. But these places were useful in their day, and afforded security to many, who would have been barbarously murdered by villains who had no respect for the laws of God or man.

Although there were several bishops in the neighboring country, still it seemed desirable to have a bishop specially attached to the new foundation, both on account of the large community in the convent, and on account of the number of strangers who visited it. This matter being made known to the proper authorities, Saint Bridget thought no person was better qualified for this dignity than Conlaeth, a pious hermit, who lived in peace and retirement not far from the banks of the Liffey. Bridget's recommendation alone would have secured his promotion; but in

addition to this, his reputation for sanctity was very great, and no person could doubt of his fitness for this responsible position. He was consecrated shortly afterwards. The ceremony took place about the year 490, probably in the Church of Kildare. It is not known who was the consecrating bishop; but it is probable that it was Saint Fiech, of Sletty, who was at this time metropolitan of the province.

Sletty is in the Queen's County, a few miles from Carlow, not far from the banks of the Barrow. Saint Fiech was a very learned man, and the school of Sletty was one of the most famous seminaries in Ireland in the fifth century. Education was gratuitous; the monks and the neighboring inhabitants were hospitable; and hence this and several other schools of this century were crowded with scholars from all parts of Ireland. Young students were prepared for the mission, and they went

forth from these seats of learning, well stored with knowledge and full of piety. They did not confine their zeal to Ireland. Every country in Europe reckons Irishmen as some of its greatest missionaries, and the number of altars which have been raised in their honor, attest the gratitude of these people. The Irish schools were the home of the stranger and the nurseries of piety and sanctity.

In the northern countries of Europe, it was usual to have priests and nuns subject to the same superioress. This was the case in England, according to Dr. Lingard, (*Hist. of the Ang.-Sax. Church*) and in Sweden, in the convents founded by Saint Bridget. The abbess wished to secure the services of competent persons to attend to the spiritual duties of the convent, and to hear the confessions of those who wished to spend a few days of retirement there. A body of clergy was attached to the church of Kildare. They

lived according to a fixed rule, and received the orders of the abbess through their superior, the Bishop of Kildare. The clergy of the church were supported by the convent, and it was quite natural to expect that the abbess would have a certain control over them, as they had no other spiritual duties to discharge except those connected with the convent. They lived near the church. The convent stood at one side of the church, and the presbytery at the other. Both establishments were independent of each other, and both communities had their own special duties to attend to.

Kildare is the only See in Leinster which was founded in the fifth century, and perhaps one of the few Sees in the Catholic Church which can boast of a succession of bishops for nearly fourteen hundred years. Besides the bishop, at one period, there were five other dignitaries attached to the church—viz., an arch-

deacon, a dean, a chancellor, a treasurer, and a chanter. Besides these dignitaries, there were four canons and eight prebendaries. They lived near the church, and chanted the Divine Office at the proper hours. Kildare was the metropolitan See of Leinster in the time of Cogitosus, who lived in the seventh or eighth century. And according to Dr. Burke, (Hib. Dom.), it is the first suffragan See in Leinster, as Meath is the first in Ulster. It acquired this pre-eminence on account of the great Saint Bridget, whom all were so anxious to respect and honor.

Cogitosus, and, after him, O'Sullivan Berr (Patriciana Decas), describe the Church of Kildare as being very large and lofty. It was built of wood, as nearly all the churches of this period were. The windows were of stained glass; the walls were hung with pictures, and several groups of figures in stone and plaster stood in niches, or surrounded the pillars

which supported the roof. At one side of the high altar was the shrine of Saint Bridget, and at the other, that of Saint Conlaeth; and magnificent lamps shed a deep and solemn light around the sanctuary. The clergy entered by a door on the right of the altar, the nuns by a door on the left. The nave of the church was divided into two compartments, and each compartment had a separate entrance. One part was set aside for the exclusive use of the women, the other for the men. The church presented a grand and solemn appearance, and the internal arrangements not only tended to prevent confusion, but still more to promote piety.

The abbess of Kildare exercised certain jurisdiction over all the convents of the Bridgetine order in Ireland. Each convent had a body of clergy attached to it, more or less numerous according to the size of the community, and the bishop of Kildare, who was appointed at the recom-

commendation of the abbess, exercised a certain jurisdiction over the clergy attached to these convents. But we must not infer from this that the Bridgetine nuns were exempt from the jurisdiction of those bishops, in whose dioceses the convents were situated. The authority of Cogitosus does not warrant such a conclusion. He says, that Saint Bridget was anxious to get a bishop appointed to consecrate the churches attached to her convents, and to regulate the clergy who officiated in them. But this, by no means, proves that the convents of Saint Bridget were exempt. The clergy may have been trained up at Kildare, under the special care of the bishop, and then sent to discharge the spiritual duties of these convents; but we have no authority for stating that such was the case. The bishop of Kildare had a special care of the Bridgetine order, and it is probable that he visited the different houses of the

order from time to time, in company with the abbess. And, as the whole order was subject to the abbess of Kildare, and all the clergy attached to the Bridgetine convents were subject to her likewise, it follows that all were subject, in some manner, to the bishop of Kildare. But it is impossible to say how far this authority extended. At all events, there is nothing which would make us believe that the Bridgetine convents were exempt from the jurisdiction of the ordinary. Of course, Church discipline was not as well regulated then, in matters of detail, as it is at present; and this is more especially true of a country lately converted to the faith. Things require some time to settle down into their normal state.

The church of Kildare belonged to the convent, and all the church plate and vestments were the property of the nuns. But from this it by no means follows, as some persons imagine, that the bishop of

Kildare was subject to the abbess. As far as the diocese was concerned, it is quite clear that the abbess had nothing to do with the jurisdiction of the bishop. The bishop officiated in the church on the principal festivals; but the abbess had a right to interfere in the purchase of vestments and in the decoration of the church. Of course, the bishop would not intermeddle in these matters; neither would he interfere in the internal arrangements of the convent, as long as matters were carried on according to strict religious discipline. But if any thing occurred which required censure, it is absurd to say that the bishop was not supreme. The abbess and the communities of nuns in his diocese acknowledged his authority, and if occasion required, felt the exercise of his power. He was the highest spiritual authority in the diocese, and to him all should submit, at least, for the time being. If they felt themselves aggrieved,

they could appeal to a higher tribunal; and if they had been wronged they received full and perfect redress. It was thus also with the convents of Saint Bridget, and this holy person would be far indeed from contravening the authority of the bishop, even in the smallest particular.

CHAPTER VII.

SHE IS VISITED BY SEVERAL SAINTS—DEATH OF
SAINT PATRICK.

THERE were some convents founded in Ireland before the time of Saint Bridget, and it seems that the warmest friendship existed between the nuns of these convents and those of her order. Saint Darrca, of Killeavy, county Armagh, spent some time at the convent of Kildara. She was a most holy person, and was never more contented than when she dis-

charged the lowest offices in the house. She acted as portress in the convent of Kildare during her visit. Like Saint Bridget, she was exceedingly charitable to the poor, and all she could procure was given to relieve their wants. She and Bridget were on the most intimate terms, and their humility was so great, that one of them often ascribed to the prayers of the other, what in reality should be attributed to her own. She seems to have brought some of her nuns with her to Kildare, and after spending some time with Saint Bridget, they returned to their own convent, edified at the good example of the nuns of Kildare. Saint Darerca died about the year 518.

Saint Ailbe, first bishop of Emly, was a most intimate friend of Saint Bridget. He visited the convent of Kildare, and spent a great deal of time conversing with her on holy things. He was a most zealous and holy man. He did so much for

the promotion of religion in Munster, that he was styled another Patrick. Saint Bridget consulted him frequently, and she always paid the greatest attention to his wise counsel. Saint Ailbe died about the year 527.

When these holy men visited the convent, Saint Bridget always requested them to preach for the community. We find that Saint Finian, of Clonard, delivered a beautiful discourse to the nuns on one occasion. This holy man founded the monastery of Clonard, whose schools attracted so many scholars during the sixth century. Saint Finian was a very learned man, and the school of Clonard acquired great celebrity under his paternal rule. Saint Bridget derived great benefit from his counsel and advice.

If we had no other grounds for believing the sanctity of Saint Bridget, than the visits of these holy men to the convent of Kildare, we should be justified in

concluding that she was gifted with more than ordinary sanctity. But every thing shows how much she was respected by her contemporaries. The nephew of King Echodius was brought to the church of Kildare to be baptized. At the request of his parents Saint Bridget stood sponsor. She told the bishop to call him Tigernach. She prophesied his future greatness, and told his friends that he would be one day raised to the episcopacy. He afterwards founded the monastery of Clones, and succeeded Saint Maccarthen in the See of Clogher. He was consecrated in the church of Kildare, and he always had a most tender affection for his spiritual mother.

Saint Bridget foretold the birth of Saint Columbkil, who was born about four years before her death. His after greatness verified all that Saint Bridget predicted, and his zeal and sanctity shed a lustre around the Irish Church, which

never shall be forgotten as long as departed worth is remembered by a grateful posterity.

Saint Gildas, of Wales, was a contemporary of Saint Bridget. He was much renowned for his sanctity and learning. He taught for some time in the schools of Armagh, and Saint Bridget sent a messenger to him to ask his blessing and to send them some token of his kindness. He sent them a small bell made by his own hands, which was preserved in the convent with the greatest care.

Saint Bridget always walked in the presence of God, and Saint Brendan formed a very high opinion of her sanctity from some conversations he had with her on this subject. She told him that she always kept her heart fixed on God, and no matter how she might be externally engaged, her affections were always centered in her dearly Beloved.

Bridget practised the greatest austeri-

ties; and her health, which was never very good, suffered severely from them. She was very much tortured by headache, and she obtained very little relief from the remedies she applied. On one occasion she asked Saint Aidus to intercede for her, and to beg of God to take away the pain, if it were His holy will. She never afterwards suffered the least uneasiness from a headache. If we credit this story, Saint Aidus must have been a young man at this period, as he did not die, according to Dr. Lanigan, till 589.

But of all the Irish saints, who lived at this period, none had a greater love and veneration for Bridget than Saint Patrick. He recognized in her a person specially raised up by Providence to perfect the great work which he himself had commenced. He watched over her from her infancy, and he was perfectly aware of the greatness of the supernatural gifts which she had received. Bridget looked

on him as a father, and she always consulted him whenever she undertook any business of great moment ; and every day furnished new proofs of his great kindness towards her. She visited him frequently, and she treasured up his wise counsels, and followed his advice with the greatest scrupulosity. It is unnecessary to say that she never repented of the confidence she placed in him, or never doubted that the advice he gave was that of a fond father to a child, who hung on his slightest nod, for the happiness of her existence.

Saint Patrick often requested Bridget to explain visions, and when Bridget hesitated, he often told her that her supernatural power for unravelling these secrets was as great as his own ; there was no difference between them in this particular, as both had been specially sent to propagate the faith in Ireland. They had only one object in view, and all their prayers and all their wonders tended to promote the one

great end. There was no rivalry between them ; no spirit of contention ; no anxiety to gain the applause of the crowd. No : the one gloried more in the praises conferred on the other, than if all had been conferred on herself. They loved the Irish Church ; and they left nothing undone which could strengthen it against the attacks of heresy. The one gave rules for training up the sacred ministers of the altar ; the other established those houses of pious virgins, which shed such lustre on our country ; and they both were shining lights to all who loved the precepts and counsels of the religion of Jesus. But amidst all their distracting cares, they always fixed their hearts on God, and most anxiously wished for that happy moment, when,—freed “from the body of this flesh,” they might enjoy the company of God for all eternity. This world is a land of exile ; but Heaven is the happy home where joy and content-

ment shall reign, and where sorrow and death shall no more come near us. Patrick and Bridget thought of this happy home, and even the cares of the Irish Church could not make them forget it.

Bridget made the shroud in which the earthly remains of Saint Patrick were interred. It was a labor of love to Bridget; and often when engaged at her work did her thoughts revolve on the nothingness of all human glory. The great and the powerful pass away; but what of them! Many of them merely encumber the earth, and the day of their death should be a cause of joy to society at large. But the good and the pious, the holy and the sanctified, these too pass away, and very often when their presence seems to be most necessary. Some die in the bloom of youth; some linger on till a gray old age; but one and all must go and abide the final sentence of happiness or misery.

Saint Patrick was now drawing to the close of a long and useful life. His work was nearly completed, and now he was going to receive the reward of his fastings and prayers. He was zealous in the work entrusted to his care ; he had little to fear from the sentence of his good Master. Bridget was divinely admonished of his approaching end, and she was anxious to obtain his dying blessing. She was about to lose her oldest and best friend, and to part with one whom she was bound to love and reverence. She took four of her companions with her, and after a long and tiresome journey, they arrived at Saul, where Saint Patrick was lying ill. Bridget knew that this would be her last visit ; but as she drew near the place, her heart became more and more sad, as the remembrance of past favors crowded on her mind. She entered the room where the dying saint was lying ; he recognized her as she approached, and

the look told more than volumes could express.

Patrick was gradually sinking. The spirit seemed to retire from its earthly tenement by degrees, partly anxious to remain, and partly desirous to wing its way to the bright home beyond the skies. A great calmness overspread his whole countenance, and his perfect composure filled the minds of those around with the love of Heavenly wisdom, and made them utter, half unconsciously: "O Lord! let our deaths be like unto his." His lips moved slowly now and then, and a loving glance at the emblem of redemption showed that he was in prayer. He calls his disciples around him, and from his dying bed he entrusts to them the interests of the Irish Church. He tells them to guard his treasure, and to watch over it as the dying gift of one whom they loved. He promised to watch over it from his Heavenly home; and how faithfully he

has kept his pledge ages have borne witness. Patrick's dying prayers drew down a blessing on the Irish Church, which shall never depart from her till "this mortality put on incorruption." O no! He is our great intercessor with Him who, after ages of idolatry, made the Irish His chosen people, and watched over them with a parent's care.

But there were special words and special blessings for Ireland's great Saint Bridget. He spoke to her as to an equal, and to one who was already certain of the joys of Heaven. He prayed for the prosperity of her order, and in solemn words gave her his dying benediction.

His strength now fails; the last sacraments of the Church are administered; the haze of death floats before his eyes; his consciousness is gone; Ireland's greatest saint departs in peace.

Bishops, priests, monks, and nuns crowded from all parts of the island to do hon-

or to Ireland's great apostle. For twelve days the tapers burn round the remains, and the holy sacrifice is offered up for his departed spirit. The funeral procession moves on towards the cathedral of Down, and Bridget follows the corpse of her best friend to its final resting place. The tears rolled silently down her cheeks, and no daughter ever bewailed a loving parent with more sincerity or more tenderness than Bridget bewailed Saint Patrick. Our Redeemer wept over His friend Lazarus, although he was sure that he would be again restored to life. And why did He give such full expression to His feelings? To show us that we also may weep over those who have been dear to us. Such sorrow is perfectly reconcilable with conformity to the Divine will; and those who extol the one so as to condemn the other, should take care lest they preach a doctrine condemned by the example of Christ. All the finer feelings are given

us for our advancement in virtue, and if we once know how to regulate their tendencies, we shall find virtue much easier, and our daily faults much diminished. Every good gift and every good thought comes from above, and we should pray continually for grace to guide us in the management of these good gifts.

The grave now closes over the remains of Saint Patrick, and the crowd are moving sorrowfully away. But there is one still kneeling by the grave: it is Bridget. A something holds her there—a something which cannot be easily severed. At length she turns away with a heavy heart; she leaves her friend in the cold grave; and a few days hence the worms will consume the earthly habitation of his noble soul. Such is human glory—the grave closes over the remains of mortal man, and then all wordly vanities cease for ever.

Bridget now turns her steps towards Kildare. She is met by her sisters, and

every heart is again filled and the tear again streams down every cheek. But recovering from the first shock, Bridget takes this occasion to remind them of the nothingness of human things. And many a soul is now happy in Heaven, which would, in all probability, never have been there if it had not been reminded at some one period of its career, of this great truth. Death fills the soul with salutary thoughts, and draws it away from the empty pleasures of the world. Bridget never ceased to weep over her friend in the silence of her soul; and often when others were in ecstasies of joy around her, she would remember the friend of her early days. She gave no expression to her feelings. They found a happy vent in a pious prayer for his departed soul, and thus she gave stronger proofs of gratitude than if she spent her days in tears and her nights in lamentations. After the first burst of sorrow, it is thus

the Christian should remember departed friends, and live in the hope of a joyful resurrection.

CHAPTER VIII.

RULES AND CONSTITUTIONS OF THE ORDER OF SAINT BRIDGET.

At this distant period of time it is not easy to determine the precise nature of the order of Saint Bridget; and since the matter is obscure, we find several religious orders claiming her as a member of their body. Some say that she was a Canoness Regular of Saint Augustine; others say that she was an Augustinian. The Benedictines claim her as theirs; and the Carmelites, who reckon a long line of saints and sages from the days of Elias, count the followers of Saint Patrick and Saint Bridget as members of their order. All bring forward reasons for establishing

their claims; but with what success we shall afterwards see.

It is asserted by some, with a good deal of confidence, that there was no written rule in the old Irish convents and monasteries, and that those rules which exist in the Irish character in the library of Brussels are of comparatively modern date. The rules and regulations were handed down by tradition; and a code of laws was finally drawn up to check the indiscreet zeal of some of the superiors of religious houses. But when were the rules of the Bridgetine Order drawn up? Whether they were drawn up in the time of Saint Bridget or long after her time, we are quite unable to determine. But still we have certain facts to guide us; certain foundations to rest upon; certain data which will enable us to decide the question with a fair amount of certainty.

1°. Cogitosus in his life of Saint Bridget says, that the convent of Kildare

“was the head of almost all the Irish convents,” and that its abbess was “venerated and obeyed” by almost all the Irish nuns. From this we may infer that the abbess of Kildare was superioress of the entire Bridgetine order in Ireland; and the restriction made by Cogitosus, in using the word “almost,” does not weaken this conclusion, as it regards those other convents which had been founded in Ireland and which did not receive the rule of Saint Bridget. .

2°. The dress of the old Irish nuns was a white veil and a white habit; and this continued in use for several centuries.

3° Haeften (*Disq. Mon.*) refers to a compendium of the rules of the order of Saint Bridget, which was kept in the Convent of the Minorites at Louvain; but these rules would not throw much light on the subject, as they were not drawn up till about the seventh or eighth century, and, perhaps, even at a later period.

We have stated these points clearly and concisely, in order to point out the line of reasoning we intend to pursue. These constitute the frame-work on which our argumentation rests; and as the authority on which they rely, cannot be called into question, our next step is to inquire to which of the orders above mentioned the nuns of Saint Bridget belonged. If we find on examination that the constitutions of these orders differed essentially from that of Saint Bridget's, as far as they are known to us, we must conclude that the claims of one and all are quite unfounded, and that her order, although having some thing in common with the others, has as good claims to originality as any of them. A general resemblance between the constitutions of two religious orders is not enough to prove their identity; neither is similarity of dress; for if such a line of argument would be admitted, the false conclusions

that should follow from such premises would be endless. We must see if there is any substantial difference; and if we show that there is, the conclusion is quite obvious. We shall now examine the principal arguments of these different claimants, and see what conclusions we must deduce from such an investigation.

Pennotti, in his history of the Canons Regular of Saint Augustine, rather supposes than proves, Saint Bridget and her nuns to have been Canonesses Regular. But perhaps he thought this quite unnecessary, as he had already undertaken to show that Saint Patrick was a Canon Regular; and having once established this point, the other followed as a matter of course. This sort of argumentation is often more apparent than solid, and we shall now endeavor to show what weight should be attached to it in the present case.

Pennotti seems to rest his implied argu-

ments on three points:—1st. That Saint Patrick was a Canon Regular. 2nd. That the habit of the nuns of Saint Bridget was white. And 3rd. That the rules drawn up by Saint Augustine for his sister were the same as those given by Saint Bridget to her nuns.

Several persons before and after the time of Pennotti have denied that Saint Patrick was a Canon Regular; and Dr. Lanigan (*His. Ec.*) asserts that the Canons Regular of the Church of Saint John Lateran did not exist till the eleventh century. If such is the case, how is it possible for Saint Patrick to have been a member of that body, as is maintained by Pennotti? The arguments brought forward by Pennotti are by no means very conclusive, and leave the question in a good deal of obscurity. But granting even that this point was established beyond the possibility of doubt, does it follow as a matter of course, that the rules

of Saint Augustine were adopted by Saint Bridget without any substantial change? Does it follow that no solid reasons existed for making some change, in order that they might be more adapted to the state of the country? It may be said that Saint Patrick was a Canon Regular, and he gave the nuns of Saint Bridget the same rule. At the very utmost, this amounts only to a probability, and leaves the matter still in doubt. Beyond this, no solid reason can be assigned for asserting that Saint Patrick gave the rules of Saint Augustine to the nuns of Saint Bridget; but we can assign positive reasons to the contrary, and show that the rules of the two orders differed at least in one very essential point.

As to the second argument of Pennotti,—the similarity of dress,—of course it proves nothing. Colgan says that the dress of the members of this order was not uniform, and that the color was differ-

ent at the same period in different parts of the Church. And to make the matter still clearer, the nuns of the Presentation and Bridgetine Orders in this country wear the same dress; and are we consequently justified in concluding that the constitutions of these Orders are identical! It is quite clear that no solid argument can rest on such a foundation.

The last argument of Pennotti remains to be examined: the rules and constitutions of the order of Saint Bridget are the same as those of the Canonesses Regular of Saint Augustine. The solution of the difficulty lies here, and the other arguments merely cleared the way for this.

Saint Augustine drew up only one code of rules, and these were given to his sister, an abbess in a certain convent, in the year 432. We find a copy of these rules in Holstein's *Codex Regularum*, and they consist of an introduction and twenty-four sections. In the introduction he reminds

them of the disorders and contentions which existed amongst them, to the great scandal of the faithful, and to the great detriment of their own souls. Some were anxious to set aside the abbess, Saint Augustine's sister, and to elect somebody else. Saint Augustine condemns their proceedings, and after exhorting them to peace and charity, he draws up a code of rules for their better government. He commands all to obey the superioress, and more especially the priest or bishop who has the immediate care of the convent. The abbess is the person in whom is vested the highest authority, and all the members of the community must regard her as their legitimate superior.

Now these rules were drawn up for the one house; the existence of a second house is neither supposed nor intimated; and the whole tenor of the rules supposes the superioress to have authority over only one community. Saint Augustine

wishes to restore peace to the community of which his sister was head, and in order to prevent the recurrence of such disorders, he sends them a code of laws. There is nothing whatever in the rules to show that Saint Augustine's sister was superioress of an entire order consisting of several communities, and each governed by its own superioress. This is the great difference between the nuns of Saint Augustine and the nuns of Saint Bridget. Each community of the Augustinian nuns, who followed the rule of Saint Augustine without a substantial change, had its own superioress, and no one house was subject to another, or at least no one superioress governed all the houses of the order. But in the Bridgetine order the case was different. The abbess of Kildare had authority over all the houses of the order in Ireland; but how far that authority extended it is impossible to say. The mere recognition of such a power shows

clearly that there was a wide difference between them and the Canonesses Regular of Saint Augustine. If the rules of both orders were in every other respect the same, this difference alone would destroy their identity so as to make them different orders. There are a great many of the approved orders of the present day, which do not differ so widely as the two above mentioned; and still they are regarded as distinct, and as such have received the approbation of the Holy See. After this lengthened investigation, we may now fairly conclude that Saint Bridget and her nuns did not belong to the Canonesses Regular of Saint Augustine.

The reasons just now adduced would upset the claims of the Augustinians, Benedictines, and Carmelites, and it is quite unnecessary to examine their arguments in detail. Special reasons could be brought forward against each, but the general arguments given above are quite

sufficient to show that Saint Bridget and her nuns belonged to none of these orders.

Here a new difficulty arises: how are we to determine the precise nature of Saint Bridget's order? Beyond what has been stated, we have nothing to guide us, nothing to rest upon except these few facts, illustrated by the details of history. But even with this scanty information, we can form a pretty accurate idea of the nature of her order.

It may be laid down as certain that Saint Patrick took a leading part in determining what rules should be adopted by Saint Bridget. He was thoroughly acquainted with the monastic institute, and the rules of Saint Augustine were well known to him. These rules spread very rapidly, and in a very short time they were adopted by a great many convents. If, in addition to this, we admit that Saint Patrick visited Rome after the year 432,

it is quite certain that he was perfectly acquainted with the rules of Saint Augustine ; and we may conclude that he was guided by the authority of this great man when he drew up or approved of those rules which were to be observed in the convents of Saint Bridget.

The faith was newly planted in Ireland, and the religious institutions of the country should be accommodated to the dispositions of the people as far as was consistent with sound monastic discipline. This induced Saint Patrick to make such changes as he thought expedient ; to relax the law in one point ; to make it more stringent in another ; and so to arrange the whole as to promote the sanctity of the individual, and to make the Bridgetine nuns more useful to the community at large. It is very probable that the rules of Saint Bridget had a good deal in common with the rules of the other religious communities ; but that they had

a something special we have already shown.

How long the rules of Saint Bridget continued to be observed in her convents, we are quite unable to determine. The rules of the Augustinian and Benedictine convents were very generally adopted at a later period by religious houses, which followed the rules of their foundresses for several centuries. This may have been the case also with the nuns of Saint Bridget. Her order was spread not only in Ireland, but also in England and Belgium, and at one period it is said to have embraced thirteen thousand members. A great many of the Bridgetine convents must have perished during the ninth and tenth centuries, when the fierce Northmen scattered fear and desolation over the whole country. They had no respect for holy things; and after pillaging the convents, they set fire to the wooden buildings; and very often the helpless inmates were

buried in the ruins. Several convents were founded during the eleventh and twelfth centuries; and we find that a great many of them were placed under the protection of Saint Bridget; but we find no mention made of any convent of the Bridgetine order being founded during this period. Perhaps the rules of the old Bridgetine order had gone into disuse, and those of Saint Augustine or Saint Benedict had been substituted in their place, as being more generally adopted in all parts of the Catholic Church. But this by no means proves that the nuns of Saint Bridget had not a special rule of their own at the beginning; because we may ask, what became of the seven rules mentioned in the life of Saint Kyran, which were drawn up by Irish saints for the monks of their respective orders? In the course of time these rules fell into disuse, and the rules of the Benedictines and Carmelites were substituted in their

stead : in the same way the rule of Saint Bridget flourished for a certain period, it died away, and gave place to others, which, in the course of time, met with a similar fate.

The translator of Allemand's *Monasticon Hibernicum* makes mention of some convents of Canonesses Regular of Saint Augustine being founded in Ireland by Saint Patrick in the fifth century, which may throw some doubt on what we have stated. . But no, the order of Saint Bridget is also mentioned by this author as being perfectly distinct from that of the Canonesses Regular ; and so far from our argument being weakened by this fact, it acquires additional strength from the testimony of this writer.

If the members of the religious orders above mentioned have failed in showing that the rules of Saint Bridget were the same as those of the nuns of their respective orders, they are still justified in

maintaining that the nuns of Saint Bridget adopted their rules at a later period. But if we grant them so much, they must admit with us that at the beginning Saint Bridget's nuns had a special rule, and that after several centuries they adopted theirs; that they constituted for a very long time a distinct religious body; that finally they adopted other rules, and regarded Saint Bridget not as the foundress of their order, but as their special protectress.

CHAPTER IX.

HER SWEETNESS—HER CHARITY—THE CONVENTUAL LIFE.

THE success of a religious house depends in a great measure on its head, and it is a well-known fact that the most pious men are not always the best superiors. Several qualifications are requisite,

and Saint Bridget possessed these in a most eminent degree. Although she was exceedingly holy from her infancy, although she guarded her heart with the greatest care, still she knew how to compassionate the weaknesses and infirmities of others. Instead of crushing the offender by a load of penance, she thought like Saint Francis of Sales, a little sweetness was much more powerful to effect a cure than a great deal of severity. She kept the example of our Divine Redeemer before her; He was all tenderness and all love; and those who come nearest to the perfection of these virtues are His most perfect followers. A kind word or a kind look sometimes does more good than could be attained by the most eloquent exhortations. Those who make the salvation of souls the great labor of their lives, should leave no means untried to acquire these virtues in all their perfection.

How far Saint Bridget practised this

virtue will be illustrated by the following anecdote:—There was a young novice in the convent of Kildare who contracted and retained an affection for a young soldier. She struggled against the temptation for a long time ; but, in the end, she determined to meet the young man, and to banish from her heart the consolation of a good conscience. She rose from her bed during the night, when all was silent, and when darkness alone would be a witness of her shame. She steals quietly along ; but the eye of God was upon her, and His grace was working in her soul. She became more and more agitated ; and, half distracted with doubt and anxiety, she ran to the fire, and put two or three burning coals into her shoes ; she then put the shoes on her feet and returned to her cell, and remained there till morning. When morning came, she was unable to discharge her ordinary duties, as she suffered dreadful pain from her feet, which

were very much burned. She told the whole story as it occurred to Saint Bridget, who, far from treating her harshly, embraced her with the greatest tenderness. She cured her feet by her miraculous power. The warmest friendship ever afterwards existed between Bridget and Derlugdacha, and ended only with their death. Derlugdacha is honored as a saint on the Irish calendar.

Bridget had the greatest compassion for the distressed, and often relieved them by her prayers. On one occasion a person was condemned to death for a certain crime. The king promised to set him at liberty if a certain ransom were paid; but the sum was so large that his friends despaired of being able to procure it. Saint Bridget, hearing of their great distress, prayed to God to free them from their great troubles. Contrary to all expectations, they succeeded in procuring the ransom, and the captive was set free.

On another occasion Bridget was requested to obtain the pardon of an offender from the King of Leinster. She went to the king and offered him a considerable ransom for the liberation of the accused; but the king refused to accept any compensation, and was fully intent on taking away his life. Bridget then entreated the king to let the culprit live another day. The king granted her request, and Bridget retired, rejoicing at having obtained even so much. Some persons, who were anxious for the death of the man, determined to kill him during the night, being convinced that if he were allowed to live till the morrow, that Bridget would most certainly obtain his liberation. In the early part of the night the man had a vision. He saw persons entering his prison, who intended to murder him. He was told to keep watching, and when the assassins entered his prison, he was told to invoke the name of Saint Bridget. The key turns in the lock

—the rusty hinges creak—the murderers enter—but the condemned man makes no resistance. The chains are taken off his limbs—he calls on Saint Bridget to protect him. The assassins, perfectly satisfied on having despatched their victim, retired; but in the morning they could find no sign of blood on the pavements nor no trace of the prisoner. After fruitless searches, they returned to the palace, where, to their surprise, they saw the man perfectly safe and sound. He was accompanied by Saint Bridget, who had just obtained his pardon from the king.

Several escaped imminent dangers through the prayers of Saint Bridget; and persons were very anxious to obtain her blessing when undertaking any very perilous duty. The following incidents will show what confidence was placed in her intercession:—

Conald, an Irish chieftain, made an in-

cursion into the territories of his enemy, and killed a great many of his vassals. On his return he took up his quarters in a deserted castle, and intended to spend the night there. Some of his men remonstrated with him on the imprudence of this step; but he was fixed in his resolution, and he told them that he would invoke the protection of Saint Bridget, and she would watch over them. Their enemies pursued them very closely, and coming towards the castle, they suspected that they had taken refuge within it for the night. They sent two or three spies forward; they entered the castle, and they saw several clerics seated round the fire with books in their hands. Others were sent who brought the same message. Being satisfied of the correctness of the statement, they returned and allowed their enemies to pursue their journey in peace in the morning.

A chieftain came to Saint Bridget to

obtain her blessing. After receiving it he retired to his own castle, and during the night an assassin entered his chamber and wounded him most severely. His friends, roused from sleep by his moans, saw the blood flowing most copiously; but he told them that the wound would not be mortal, as he had obtained the blessing of Saint Bridget. The result showed that he was not mistaken. On the next day he returned to thank Saint Bridget for having protected him.

Besides the other extraordinary gifts conferred on Saint Bridget, she also possessed the gift of prophecy. She and some of her nuns were walking one day not far from the convent, when they saw a young man running at some distance from them in a great haste and in a very unbecoming manner. On coming towards them, Saint Bridget asked him why he acted in this manner. He said, "that he ran to the kingdom of Heaven." After

further conversation he asked Saint Bridget and her nuns to pray for him. Before his departure Saint Bridget told him that she would receive the viaticum from his hands; and although up to this time he led a very irregular life, he was shortly afterwards converted, and by his edifying conduct repaired the scandal of his early years. He always remembered the prophecy of Saint Bridget, and he took special care to keep the hand clean which would administer the viaticum to such a saint. Hence he was called Nennidh, the clean-handed. He afterwards left the country and passed over to Britain, in order that Saint Bridget might be left on this earth as long as possible. He was most anxious to remain in Britain, but he was driven by contrary winds to the Irish shore, and hearing of the illness of Saint Bridget, he went to Kildare, where he had the happiness of administering the viaticum to her. Nennidh died a most

holy death, and he is honored as a saint on the Irish calendar.

Bridget led a most mortified life. Satisfied with the coarsest food, she also practised the greatest corporal austerities. We are told by her biographers that she was accustomed to spend a great part of the night in a pond of water not far from the convent. She continued this practice for some time; but, on one occasion, she found the pond quite dry. She returned to the convent with her companion, and in the morning she found the pond filled with water as usual. This happened on two or three occasions, and as the change could not have taken place by natural causes, she inferred that such mortifications were not pleasing to God, who made known to her His will in such an extraordinary manner.

She was also gifted with an extraordinary power of reconciling disputes between neighbors. She was often appealed

to in cases of this sort, and she scarcely ever failed in arranging matters amicably. Sometimes she adjusted the dispute by her good sound sense, sometimes by her miraculous power. On one occasion, she was met by two brothers of the O'Neill family, who were contending at the time for the supreme authority. Clonald, on meeting Saint Bridget, asked her blessing, as he was pursued by his brother Corpreus, who was anxious to take away his life, in order that he might enjoy his father's kingdom. Saint Bridget blessed him, and they had not advanced many steps, when Corpreus was seen advancing with his men. Saint Bridget's companions became dreadfully alarmed, but she told them not to fear, that there would be no encounter between the hostile bands. Clonald stands still, and Corpreus embraces him at the request of Saint Bridget. After a short stop, they both took their respective courses, each quite unconscious of having

embraced the enemy whom he intended to despatch in the first warlike encounter.

Bridget was also gifted with the virtue of meekness in a most extraordinary degree. On several occasions, she received nothing but the most vile reproaches in return for the greatest favors. On these occasions, she never lost temper; she never became ruffled by any amount of abuse that might be heaped on her. No matter what might be said, Bridget always preserved that equanimity which is the fruit of most exalted virtue. She bore all those little crosses patiently; and thus derived spiritual strength from the faults of her enemies. Every little cross, borne with the proper spirit, will be treasured up for us in Heaven, and will adorn our crown in the land of the blessed.

Love was the moving spring of all Bridget's actions; and, as her love increased, her duties became more easy, her mortifications more pleasing. The pious

maxims instilled into her mind when her heart was most susceptible of the finest impressions, were never forgotten; and those good principles guided her through life, and caused her to arrive at the highest sanctity. Love makes labor light. Hours spent in prayer seemed moments, and moments of distraction seemed hours. Her heart was fixed on God, and He was always near her. He registered every action, He rewarded every aspiration. He prompted every pious thought, and gave her strength to reduce the thought to action. Oh! what a kind and munificent master we serve! He watches over us; He guards us! He sustains our tottering steps; His greatest happiness seems to be in assisting us. He moves our will by His grace; He strengthens us to perform the good work; He then rewards us for His own benefits. Oh! if we were more thoroughly convinced of God's manner of acting, we should sin less and love more!

As love makes labor light, all the works of charity which Saint Bridget discharged, no matter how unpleasant they might have been, were light and easy. Sometimes, when pressed down with bodily fatigue, she would rouse her sinking spirits, by saying, "I am doing this little act of love for Jesus;" and immediately her spirits would get strong, and her languor would vanish. It is hard for the worldly-minded to conceive how easy the conventual life is to those who have sacrificed all for God. Worldlings see the barred gates and the seclusion from worldly pastimes. They imagine that the inmates are morose and gloomy; but they see only the dark side of the picture, and as "every thing appears yellow to the jaundiced eye," so every thing about a convent seems painful and revolting to the worldly minded. They form their own ideas of happiness, but they see not, nor cannot see, "for their minds are worldly," that real and

solid happiness which proceeds from a good conscience. They may join in parties of pleasure, and imagine, in the whirl of excitement, that they alone are happy; but this excitement passes away; the dark abyss is yawning before them, and to stifle this remorse, to hide the recollections of their past excesses, they dash into new enjoyments, only to be tortured by them in turn. They may flatter themselves that the attainment of some long-wished for object will fully satisfy the cravings of their hearts; but, when all they wished for is obtained, they find their hopes blighted, perhaps their sorrows are only commencing. If these people have their moment of pleasure, they have their moments of pain also; and when the last moment comes, where is the pious Catholic that would wish to change places with one of the votaries of pleasure!

But the cloistered nun is truly happy. Her days pass in silence and peace. She

has given up all for the attainment of one great object; the path is chalked out before her. Every prayer, every work of charity, every little sacrifice, makes the possession of this object more certain. She fasts, she prays, perhaps she hears the sounds of revelry from a distance; but these make her more attached to her God, more anxious to give up every tie for His dear sake. She labors on in peace and love; and when Heaven is once attained, when there is no more room for hope, then her heart is full, her soul is enraptured, and she blesses God a thousand times for having granted her the grace to sacrifice all worldly joys for the sake of Him, who pointed out the way to the bright realms beyond the grave.

As the love of our neighbor is an offshoot of the love of God, Bridget never allowed an opportunity to pass of assisting her neighbors. She gave alms to the poor, she visited the sick, she consoled the

afflicted, she instructed the ignorant, and prayed for the hard-hearted. Many an afflicted heart she consoled; many an erring child she brought back to repentance.

But it would be an endless task to enumerate all her virtues. She possessed every Christian virtue which could make the soul dear to God, or which could claim the love of those who esteem these virtues in all their practical humility. Like every other child of Adam, she had her share of sufferings and crosses, and her share of human frailty to bewail. She willed what was most perfect; but sometimes she found that human nature, even assisted by grace, is unable to carry into effect what grace suggests to the will. When she committed any fault (and who has not?) she derived great strength from these very defects; she was not downcast and disheartened. O no! Her humility was profound; she knew her own weakness; she asked pardon for the de-

fect; she resolved to do better for the future, and she walked on as steadily in the ways of perfection as if nothing had befallen her.

It is thus the saints act. Their faults make them more humble, and remind them of their own nothingness. Some persons become quite sad and dejected when they commit some trifling fault; they know not what came over them; they are quite astounded at their frailty. This feeling of uneasiness arises very often from wounded pride. They find from experience their own frailty; and so far from being improved by the discovery, they lose all courage, and are often tempted to lead more free-and-easy lives for the future. The great remedy for this temptation is to remember what we are, and how we have acquired our present sanctity. Poor and miserable of ourselves, we travel on, rising and falling continually, and very often rejecting more graces by

our impatience, than would be sufficient to make us saints if we corresponded with them. He who wishes to advance, even to the second or third degree of sanctity, must examine the impulses of his own heart and restrain those emotions of pride, which weaken the strength and destroy the security of the soul.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEATH OF SAINT BRIDGET.

THUS Saint Bridget spent her days, promoting the spiritual interests of her neighbors, and laying up treasures for herself in Heaven, which "the rust or moth doth not consume." The good of her neighbor was always subservient to the good of her own soul; and she never sacrificed the one to the other. Well-ordered charity commands us to attend to our own sanc-

tification in the first place, and then only to that of our neighbor. We promote our own sanctification by ministering to the spiritual wants of others; but we should endeavor to be always secure;—we should keep the bright lamp of grace always illuminating our own hearts, and never allow its bright light to be extinguished. If we attend to ourselves, the works of charity performed for our neighbors will be so many gems in our Heavenly crown; if we neglect ourselves, all these works will not avail us:—we shall never be saved by such works if we expel the grace of God from our souls.

Now, the days of the great Saint Bridget were drawing to a close. She was now in her seventieth year, and every hour of that long life was spent in the service of God. When reason began to dawn—when she heard of God, of Jesus, and of Mary—when she learned what was most perfect and what was most holy—

she resolved to become a saint, and like Saint Paul, "to do all for the glory of God." This was the end of all her actions: this was her greatest ambition. How well she attained this end, her long life of sanctity affords ample proof.

When we remember her prudence, her sweetness, her gentleness, we may easily conceive what must have been the feelings of the nuns of her order when they witnessed the sad change in her appearance—when they saw death gradually approaching. We know what it is to lose a kind and affectionate parent, who watched over our early years, and guarded us against the wiles of a deceitful world. Few there are who have not wept over departed friends, and followed to the tomb those whom they most tenderly loved. The friendships of religious are more solid and more lasting, and when these are severed, there is a void deep and unfathomable, which very often is

never filled up during the remainder of life. Bridget had many sincere and warm friends. She saw all the sisters enter the community; she watched over them with more than maternal love; she reproved them gently when they erred, and consoled them when the world seemed dark and dreary,—when all seemed to have abandoned them. What now must have been their feelings, when about to lose her who guided them by her wisdom and watched over them with a mother's care? In leaving the world, they left father and mother; but in religion, they found a mother not less tender, but far more holy. They never felt the loss of parental care whilst Bridget was near to aid and assist them.

Derlugdacha was most attached to Saint Bridget; and from the day she unfolded to her the hidden secrets of her heart, that strong religious friendship sprang up between them, which cannot

be shaken by considerations which destroy attachments more worldly but less spiritual. She often wished to have the consolation of dying before Saint Bridget, to receive her parting blessing, and to appear before the throne of God aided by the prayers of her living friend. But this consolation was denied her; she must kneel by the bed of the dying saint, and live on without that friend who had so often consoled her.

Bridget was forewarned of her death for a considerable time before it took place. She told Derlugdacha that she herself should die on the 1st of February; and that on the first anniversary of her death she would be united to her in Heaven. If the first part of the prophecy was heart-rending to Derlugdacha, she was consoled by the second; she expected to join Saint Bridget in the land of the blessed, where there would be no more separations, no more sorrows.

The symptoms of delicacy became more and more developed. With difficulty she moves along to visit the Blessed Sacrament. She spends her time in prayer; and the sweet names of Jesus and Mary are frequently on her lips, but ever in her heart. She becomes more and more feeble; she is now confined to her bed. Persons speak about her illness, but they are unwilling to express their fears; they even shudder at the possibility of her death. The rumor spreads abroad, and many a prayer ascends from the fervent Irish heart for her recovery. The news is told to Nennidh, and remembering the prophecy of Saint Bridget, he hastens to Kildare.

The sainted Conlaeth died about the year 519. He spent a long life in the service of God, and went to enjoy the reward of his labors. Some say that Natfroic, Saint Bridget's chaplain, succeeded him, but this is denied by others as not

being sufficiently sustained by historical evidence.

The fatal moment now arrives. The symptoms of approaching death indicate that the last sacraments should be administered. The blessed sacrament is brought by Saint Nennidh from the church; Extreme Unction is administered; the image of the crucifix is presented to Saint Bridget; and she prepares to receive her Jesus for the last time. Often did she receive Him before, and many a time did He console her when friends seemed to desert her. In moments of sweetness after communion her heart often became sensibly inflamed; a sensation of warmth crept over her body, and a flood of Heavenly joy filled her soul. These recollections passed across her mind, and she now endeavored to repay her Jesus for so many favors by the intensity of her love. The consecrated particle is raised up before her eyes, and the words "behold the Lamb of God," fall

on the ears of the dying saint. Her heart is full to overflowing, and when the words, "O' Lord, I am not worthy," fall from the lips of Saint Nennidh, the tears of contrition and love trickle down her cheeks.

The consecrated particle is now laid on her tongue; a Heavenly calm rests upon her features; her God is now with her; she asks no more Oh! the calmness, the sweetness, the happiness of a dying saint! The gentle breathing shows that life is still there; she sleeps, but she awakes to sleep no more; she is in the home of the happy.

Happy are those who die the death of the saints. And happy are those who witness such deaths. The world passes away, and eternity opens before them. They leave a life of sorrow and pain; they enter on a life of happiness and joy. They leave a life of uncertainty; they enter on a life of security. They leave a life of trials and temptations; they enter

on a life of rewards and enjoyments. They leave sorrow, sickness, afflictions, death; they enter on happiness, enjoyment, contentment, life. Oh! that we were wise, and would remember the shortness of life and the rewards beyond the grave. But nothing can keep these things sufficiently before our minds. We are carried away by every bubble, and seek pleasures in every change. Earthly by nature, we seek the things of earth, and very often place all our happiness here, and totally forget eternity. But the sad accounting day shall come, and worldly wisdom shall receive its reward. Then shall the cry of despair ascend from the lovers of the world, and there shall be no body able to assist them. Their cry shall ascend for endless ages, and when millions of millions of years will have passed away, their miserable eternity will be only commencing.

The news of Saint Bridget's death

spread rapidly through - the country. Many a heart felt sorrowful, for many a heart had been relieved by the prayers and directed by the admonitions of Saint Bridget. Few indeed there were who did not lament her death as a national calamity. Prayers and masses are offered up for her pure soul, and the Irish Catholic was all fervor when praying for his own Saint Bridget. To pray for Bridget was the first thought, the first suggestion of Catholic devotion. But a moment! They remember her saintly life and her miraculous powers. They ask her to pray for them, to watch over them, to defend them. They recommend their infant children to her protection, and they ask her to model their hearts on her own.

When the infant of Catholic parents was baptized, it was put under the protection of Saint Bridget; and we can scarcely find an old Irish Catholic family in which we shall not find a Mary or a

Bridget. This custom has been handed down from our Catholic ancestors, and it should be retained as one of the precious relics of early times. Modern refinement disregards these common vulgar names, and with them disregards a great many of the common Christian virtues also. It shows a narrow-mindedness and an aping after gentility, which should be trampled on by every Catholic heart. I hope the day is far distant when Catholic parents will blush to call their children by these names.

We are not told any thing about the particulars of the burial of Saint Bridget, but there can be no doubt that the church of Kildare was crowded to excess on the day of her interment. The Irish are a generous people, and they did not fail to pay those ordinary marks of respect to the great saint that had just departed from amongst them.

Her remains were interred in the church

of Kildare at one side of the high altar, the remains of Saint Conelaeth at the other. In the time of Cogitosus, the rich shrines were to be seen; but, alas! the destroyer came and swept away every trace of former piety, every vestige of Catholic devotion.

The precise year of Saint Bridget's death is not known, but it is probable she died about the year 523, in the seventieth year of her age. Dr. Lanigan thinks it more probable that she died in the year 525. The difference is trifling, and does not in any way affect the object of our narrative.

Kildare may well glory in the great Saint Bridget. It was the principal scene of her labors, her temporary resting-place, and it is now the object of her special care. She remembers the place of her earthly pilgrimage, and the many kind hearts and sincere friends that surrounded her "in the cell of the oak." And if the

poor Irish emigrant remembers with affection the place of his early days, can we imagine that Saint Bridget will forget the scene of her heroic virtues, the place of her earthly habitation? Oh, no! She watches over the church of Kildare with a tender maternal love, and we may ascribe to her prayers the uninterrupted succession of bishops from the days of Saint Conlaeth to our own time. And as she watched over it for the past, we may confidently hope that she will do so for the future. She will watch over the young, and in their old age she will lead them to the mansions of eternal bliss.

Oh! how beautiful is the Catholic doctrine on the invocation of saints. We read their lives, we admire their virtues, we love them, we pray to them. We love to imitate their bright examples, and we ask them to obtain those graces for us which are necessary to attain this end. Every Catholic who has a truly Catholic

heart has some special favorite amongst God's chosen band. He loves this saint for some special virtue which he is anxious to obtain, and he asks his special friend to obtain this gift for him. What a consoling devotion for a loving heart. How consistent with the workings of God's providence!

But the Protestant doctrine freezes the most tender feelings of a loving nature. It takes away every thing that is loving in religion, and leaves nothing behind but dryness and barrenness. Nothing is found in their churches to assist our sluggish nature—nothing to draw us to God—nothing to stir up our finer feelings. Their ritual is equally cold, and the manner in which it is carried out adds more and more to its coldness. Every thing about the church and its service only deadens the finer feelings and creates a distaste for all religious worship.

The doctrine of the Catholic Church is

a doctrine of love, and this has been the prominent feature of her liturgy and her worship. She works on our nobler feelings,—she teaches us hidden doctrines by external symbols, and reminds her children of the different mysteries of Redemption at the different seasons of the year. Now she is clad in the vestments of sorrow, and in mournful tones reminds man of the Hill of Calvary; again she puts on her gayest robes, and bids him rejoice at the prospect of a glorious resurrection. Her music, her vestments, her sacred vessels, her religious ceremonies, her grand processions, all fill the heart with love, and proclaim that there is something more than human here.

We should be proud of the old faith—we should never be ashamed of our religion—we should love the saints—we should specially love Saint Bridget one of the brightest stars in the Heavenly Jerusalem,—one who has so unceasingly employed

her influence with the Almighty, and to the end of time will continue to employ it in behalf of the people and the Church of Ireland.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GREAT DEVOTION OF THE PEOPLE OF EUROPE TOWARDS SAINT BRIDGET.

THE death of the saint caused many a heart to bewail her loss. Her spiritual children lost a guide and a mother, and they long felt the want of that saintly tenderness with which she was so highly gifted. But, if it were possible, she was more sincerely regretted by the poor than by any other class in society. They never appealed to her charity in vain. They always found in her a good and a generous benefactress. Although those who succeeded her followed closely in her footsteps, and merited for the convent the

appellation of "the stranger's home," still there was a something wanting ; a something, which cannot be well described ; a something in the manner, a something in the tone of voice, which made the gift ten times more dear on account of the benevolence of the giver. But a grateful posterity always remembers the spiritual favors of the saints, and raises altars in their honor, to thank God for having raised up such pure and bright lights amongst them.

God is the supreme Lord of the whole universe, and He conserves all its parts by His power. Were He to withdraw His sustaining hand, the entire world would instantaneously revert to its original nothingness. But God does not regulate or preserve His creatures solely by his own direct and immediate action. In the physical world, it is obvious that He employs secondary causes as the instruments of His will and the agents of His providence.

He does not ordinarily preserve the existence of any being by the immediate interposition of His power. It is true that He clothes the lily of the valley with a beauty that surpasses the glory of Solomon ; that He furnishes food for the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field ; and that He affords to man, the lord of the universe, all the means to enable him to fulfil the designs for which he was created. But it is equally certain that those objects are to be effected by the agency of created causes. It is by the combined influence of earth, water, air, heat, and light, that the lily acquires its beauty ; it is by the means of natural causes that the small seed produces the gigantic oak ; it is by the means of the same causes that all living creatures obtain food and clothing ; but God alone is the sole mover, the first cause of action in all creation.

If it is true that His providence employs the instrumentality of secondary causes

in the material world, it is equally true that He adopts the same course in the supernatural order. He has instituted sacraments and sacrifices. He has prescribed prayers and mortifications. He has ordained innumerable other means to promote His own glory and the salvation of man. He has created angels and arch-angels; He has glorified many of His children; and Saint Thomas teaches that even His most exalted creatures are destined by him to assist those of an inferior order in attaining their last end. Hence we may conclude that all the Heavenly choirs assist man in his onward course; and if we, in this vale of tears, can pray for each other, and if sometimes those prayers are most efficacious, the saints can also pray for us, and their prayers, rushing forth from hearts without spot or stain, are more efficacious still.

If it is lawful to ask the prayers of our friends, it is also lawful to ask those of the

saints; and such has been the constant tradition of the faithful from the days of the patriarchs to our own time. We know not how they hear our prayers, as we know not the extent of their supernatural gifts; but we know that they do hear us, and obtain many special favors for us. We know not how the little seed produces the beautiful flower; we know not how the mighty oak draws sustenance from the barren rock; we know not how the little stream, that flows so gently from the mountain's top, draws constant life from the distant sea; we know not how the saints and angels hear the silent prayer which human ear could never catch; but still the fact is plain; all are perfectly certain. God works by His secondary causes; the saints can pray for us; and that they do is certain from the constant tradition of Christ's own Church.

The devotion of the Irish to Saint Bridget was most tender and full of the

greatest confidence. Hundreds of churches were dedicated to her honor, hundreds of convents adopted her rules ; hundreds of monasteries were placed under her protection, and hundreds of Catholic hearts claimed her as a patroness, and invoked her name when threatened by any danger. When the little children began to lisp they were made familiar with her name ; and mothers loved to tell them of her goodness and her sweetness. Thus, devotion to Saint Bridget was a part of the religious education of every Irish child. And when the child grew up and began to feel and to act as a man, he did not forget the pious lessons of his youth. The more he knew, the more reasonable the devotion to Saint Bridget appeared ; and the more pious he became, the more was this devotion increased. The young student was made familiar with the virtues of Saint Bridget, and his heart burned to have an opportunity of making her vir-

tues known. And when he became a priest he redeemed his promise ; he did all in his power to increase the number of her clients.

When the Irish missionaries were found in every part of Europe, converting those barbarians who overwhelmed the Roman legions, they carried with them a filial devotion to Saint Bridget, and sounded the praises of her name along the valleys of the Rhine and through the mountains of Switzerland. Wherever an Irish missionary preached the Gospel, there Bridget was loved and honored ; and wherever temples were erected by them to the living God, these temples were dedicated to Saint Bridget. Her name was as familiar to the Belgian husbandman and to the Swiss shepherd-boy, as it was to the nuns of her own order. The saints are the friends of all who invoke them, and they hear the prayers of the distant stranger as attentively as they do the

prayers of those who are bound up with them in the ties of kindred.

Hector Boetheus, the Scotch historian, speaks of the sincere devotion of the Scotch, Picts, English, and Welsh, towards Saint Bridget. Several churches were dedicated to her honor in these countries, and several convents were placed under her protection. Such was their devotion towards her, that she was styled a second Mary. But now the posterity of those sincere clients of Saint Bridget ridicule the simplicity of their ancestors, and condemn their piety as folly and absurdity.

Many an Irish saint preached and labored in Belgium ; and many a noble temple was erected in honor of Saint Bridget. Rumoldus published her praises ; and now the pious Catholics of Mecklin remember their sainted apostle, and devoutly pray to him and Saint Bridget to watch over them. The office of Saint Bridget is found in the old Belgian breviaries, and was

solemnly chanted in the old cathedrals before her priests were slaughtered and her altars overturned.

Switzerland, the scene of the labors of Saints Columbanus and Gallus, was the land of noble Catholic hearts ; and many of these were steeled by the prayers of Saint Bridget when fighting for their religion and their God. Noble by nature, they became more noble still by the teachings of faith ; and although many of them have fallen away, corrupted by the gangrene of heresy, still the Catholic heart is still warm with love, and often prays to Ireland's great Saint Bridget.

Stephen White, a learned Jesuit, speaks in the highest terms of the devotion of the Germans to Saint Bridget. He says that her office was chanted for more than a thousand years in her noble cathedrals on the first of February ; and as in other countries, there were several churches erected in her honor.

Even Italy and Rome, the centre of the Catholic world, were quite familiar with the name of the Irish Saint; and those devout missionaries who preached the faith even in Rome itself, never forgot to speak of her, whom they were taught to honor from their earliest years.

France and Spain and Portugal were visited by Irish missionaries, and their schools and colleges owe a great part of their celebrity to Irish talent and Irish learning. The name of Bridget was well known amongst them, and one of these countries glories in having preserved some of her precious relics for some hundred years.

The name of Saint Bridget is mentioned in the old martyrologies, and she is numbered amongst the greatest saints of the Church. She is mentioned by all the hagiologists as being endowed with every virtue, and as being entitled to the respect and esteem of the faithful. But suffice it

to say, that the Irish missionaries preached the faith all over Europe for eight or ten hundred years, and wherever they proclaimed the praises of Jesus and Mary, there they proclaimed the praises of Bridget also. Every Irish heart glowed with love for this great saint, and every Irish tongue made known her virtues.

We may also form an idea of the greatness of Saint Bridget from the manner in which the saints have spoken of her. These holy men vie with each other in heaping on her the most endearing appellations. In using these expressions they wish to show their love and to teach us how we should speak of the friends of God.

Saint Brendan and Saint Cummin tell us that she always walked in the presence of God, and that her heart was always fixed on Him. When talking to her companions, when engaged in manual labors, when occupied in works of charity, she

always remembered the presence of her Maker. She never allowed her mind to wander from Him. We often think of those we love, and Bridget's heart was so fixed on her Jesus, that she always retained a fond remembrance of Him in her soul. Her first thoughts in the morning were of Him; her last thoughts at night rested on the same dear object. The beauty of the heavens, the loveliness of a flower, the sweetness of a fruit, the freshness of the morning breeze, the grandeur of the sea, the glories of the setting sun, all reminded her of her God—all were invitations to praise and love Him.

The love for the Blessed Virgin always goes hand in hand with the love of Jesus; and the heart that loves Jesus most is most devout to Mary. The love of the one cannot exist without the love of the other; and those who blaspheme the one also blaspheme the other. The Irish always had a most tender love for the

Blessed Virgin, and Saint Bridget was called by the Irish saints "the second Mary," "the Mary of Erin." Nothing could give us a more exalted idea of her sanctity, nothing could express their love more forcibly. To place her near the mother of God would be a great honor; to place her next her is the greatest mark of respect they could pay her. Mary was their refuge in every danger, and to honor both by the same act, they called them by the same name.

But this did not satisfy the piety of these holy men. They wished to extol her still more. She is called the "Mother of Christ" partly on account of her great resemblance to the Blessed Virgin, and partly on account of her perfection; for Christ himself has said, "that he, who does my will, is my father and my mother." In this sense she deserved this title, for the will of God was "her meat and her drink;" she was never so happy

as when she was carrying out the designs of His mercy.

The consecrated virgins of Erin had a most tender devotion to Saint Bridget. She was their spiritual mother; she was their great protectress. When they sought consolation, they prayed to their patroness; when they required an example, she stood before them. Her life was the constant subject of their meditation; her virtues the constant object of their desires. They were imitators of her as she was of Christ; and those who followed most closely in her footsteps, resembled most closely their Divine Master. She was a bright and shining light, and showed the sisters of her order how far human nature, assisted by grace, can practise the sublime teachings of Christian morality. What grace has effected in one, grace will effect in another, if no obstacle is thrown in its way. We derive great benefit from reading the lives of the saints on this account;

because we see how many of them were tempted, and, after being purified, shone forth with greater lustre than if they never felt their own weakness. Some of them spent their youth in sin; some of them were not converted from their evil habits till nature was scarcely capable of more enjoyment; some lived always pure and holy, and never lost that purity of soul which was recovered by the waters of baptism; but all affords us great grounds of hope; and what a merciful God did for them, He will also do for us if we but will it sincerely. Their God is our God; and their resting-place shall be ours.

Several wonderful things are mentioned by Cambrensis regarding the perpetual miracles of Saint Bridget; but as they are mentioned by no other author, many regard them as spurious and unworthy of belief. He brought many unfounded charges against the Irish, and, consequently, we may, at least, justly suspect

his veracity, even on matters which are more or less flattering to our national vanity. But as "the fire of Kildare's holy fane" is so well known, I shall relate the history of it as given by Cambrensis.

A custom existed amongst the Irish of blessing fire on the eve of the Pasch, and by supplying fresh fuel, the fire was kept lighting till the return of the same festival on the following year. This custom is mentioned in the life of Saint Kyran; and it is still observed with a good deal of care in several parts of Ireland. Sometimes the fire was miraculously preserved lighting, and an instance of this is mentioned in the life of Saint Kevin. Cambrensis says that a fire was lighted in the convent of Kildare in honor of Saint Bridget, and that it never was extinguished during seven hundred years. The fire was constantly supplied with fresh fuel, but no ashes ever remained after the consumption of it; the fire was

constantly attended by the nuns, and no man was permitted to enter the small enclosure around the fire-place. Some two or three attempted to blow the fire, and received a most summary punishment for their rashness. He moreover adds, that the community of the convent of Kildare consisted of twenty nuns, including Saint Bridget; that the community never exceeded this number; and that the fire was left in care of Saint Bridget on the twentieth night; and that it was attended to as usual. The fire continued in the convent till the thirteenth century, when it was extinguished by the orders of Henry Loudres, archbishop of Dublin, as savoring of pagan superstition. Whatever may be said of the story of Cambrensis, there seems to be little doubt of the existence of some such fire in the thirteenth century. Whether it existed since the early part of the sixth century or not, we cannot positively assert.

Cambrensis mentions three or four other facts not less curious ; but, as they contain very little practical information, we refer the curious to his own work, where they can satisfy their thirst for the wonderful.

CHAPTER XII.

HER RELICS.

THE relics of the saints, have been always held in the greatest veneration from the earliest ages of Christianity. We see the Christians of Smyrna collecting the relics of Saint Polycarp and preserving them as precious mementoes of that holy man. We see the Christians of Antioch hoarding up the relics of Saint Ignatius as "a most inestimable treasure." The persecutors of the Christians took special care to conceal the mangled bodies of the martyrs from the Christians ; and,

after exhausting their utmost cruelty, they burned their lifeless remains and cast their ashes to the winds of Heaven, in order to prevent the survivors from paying any mark of respect to their departed friends. Go to the Roman catacombs, and there behold the vestiges of ancient Christianity, and then tell me how the early Christians honored the relics of the saints. Their tombs were specially marked out, and the hallowed altar of the Christian religion was raised over their graves. When the persecution ceased this devotion became more and more developed. Churches were raised in their honor, and kings and emperors vied with each other in decorating these magnificent temples. Their shrines were made of the most precious metals, and the ruby and the diamond sparkled with all their brilliancy, throwing a mystic halo around the object of Catholic devotion. Times have been changed, but the doctrine of the true

Church always remains the same. The faith of the Catholics of Smyrna and Antioch is the same as the faith of the Catholics of Kildare and Down. And as the former preserved the relics of Polycarp and Ignatius, so the latter preserved those of Patrick and Bridget; and they would have preserved them inviolable to the present day, only the invader came, who scattered their ashes in order to possess the shrines.

We see how the English people venerate the memory of their statesmen, their warriors, their poets, their philosophers, and they sneer at us for venerating the memory of the saints. They sneer because we raise up monuments to their honor, and enshrine their bones in silk and gold; but in so doing, they show their own inconsistency, and condemn by their words what they approve by their acts. But they say that we pay a religious honor to the saints—that we pay them that honor

which is due to God alone. It is certain that all supreme honor should be given to God alone, and if Protestants could show that we pay such honor to the saints, their argument would be conclusive. But this cannot be shown. No Catholic holds such doctrine. When we honor the saints or respect their relics, we thank God for the gifts conferred on these His servants. We honor God as the supreme Lord: we honor the saints as His friends, enriched with His gifts and bending down with His graces. And when we incline and genuflect before the relics of the saints, we honor them as being once the temples of those noble souls, which sacrificed everything dear for His name's sake. So far from reviling the saints, or scattering their ashes to the winds of Heaven, we love them as the friends of God and the faithful accomplishers of His holy will. And who shall say that this derogates from the honor due to God? Who shall

say that this exalts the creature by depressing the Creator? No doctrine can be more beautiful—no doctrine more in accordance with the mystery of redemption.

The remains of Saint Bridget were interred in the Church of Kildare; and many a devout pilgrim visited her tomb, and many a miracle was performed through her intercession. Her relics were afterwards enshrined; but at what precise period we are unable to determine. The annals of Tigernach and of Ulster state that the relics of several Irish saints were enshrined during the eight century; and it is probable that those of Saint Bridget were enshrined about the same period. In the time of Cogitosus, her relics reposed in a magnificent shrine at one side of the high altar, and those of Saint Conlaeth at the other. The shrines were decorated with gold and silver and precious stones; and lamps of exquisite workmanship continually burned around them. Kings and

nobles were anxious in those days to pay marks of respect to the memory of the saints.

These shrines remained in the church of Kildare during the eighth century,—perhaps the most glorious period of the Irish Church. Towards the end of this century, the fierce Northmen made their appearance on the Irish shore. Churches, altars, convents, and monasteries, were plundered, and the innocent inmates slaughtered at the altar. Nine hundred monks were murdered in Bangor by these barbarians, the shrine of Saint Congall broken open, and his relics scattered to the winds. The shrines of the saints were most anxiously sought after by these marauders, and when found, the relics were desecrated, and the shrines were carried away to be melted down to furnish means of enjoyment to these scourges of the Irish Church.

These were sad days for Ireland. All

she held dear was trampled on; all she respected was violated. The church of Kildare must have been an object worthy of the daring deeds of the Danes of Dublin. In 831, the church was plundered; but there is no mention made of the shrines. They must have been removed to a place of safety before the incursion. The religious of Kildare must have been fully aware of their danger, and they took those precautionary measures which prudence dictates in such circumstances.

It is quite certain that the relics of Saint Bridget were removed to the cathedral of Down, but at what precise period the removal of them took place has not been ascertained. Colgan says that they were removed, probably by Killach, who was abbot of Kildare monastery for some time, and afterwards abbot of Hy from the year 853 to the year 865. The relics of Saint Columbkil were also removed

to Down about the year 878, and the relics of Saint Patrick had been always in the church, although some considerable portions of them seem to have been preserved in the cathedral of Armagh. As the political affairs of the country became more and more complicated, it was necessary to secure the relics of these three great saints. They were taken from the shrines, placed in three coffins, and buried in the cathedral in a sort of triple cave. It seems that the shrines were not put into the cave—1st, because these precious receptacles would have been destroyed in the course of time; 2d, because there is no mention made of the shrines when the relics were found; 3d, because the shrine of Saint Columbkille was carried away by the Danes of Dublin in the year 1127, which they afterwards returned. It is quite probable that there were several smaller relics of these saints in some churches, and even in the possession of

some private families ; but the larger portion of their relics were buried in the cathedral of Down.

The greatest caution was necessary in the deposition of those relics. If the Danes knew in what part of the church they were buried, they would soon scatter them. The spot was marked by no stone ; no external sign pointed out the place to the anxious inquirer. The faithful knew that the remains of these saints were interred in the church ; but beyond this, after a short time no one living could indicate the precise spot.

Three hundred years rolled by, and the relics of Ireland's greatest saints were still lying concealed in the cathedral of Down. Many a holy bishop was anxious to discover where this precious treasure lay concealed ; but this was reserved for Saint Malachy, Bishop of Down, and third successor in that See of the great Saint Malachy, Primate of Armagh. This holy man spent

nights in the church, praying before the altar, and begging of God to make known to him the precise spot in which the relics had been interred. On one night, when a solemn silence reigned all round, the holy man, praying as usual, saw a bright beam of light shining on a particular part of the floor of the church. Somewhat surprised, he continued his prayer, and he was led to believe that he would find the relics of the three saints under the floor, where the brightest light was shining. He procured the necessary assistance, and found the coffin of Saint Patrick lying between those of Saint Columbkil and Saint Bridget. His prayers had been heard, and now his joy was unbounded.

The relics were found in the year 1185. The bishop was very anxious to have them translated, with all the pomp of the ritual, to some becoming place in the church. John de Courcy, Lord of Down, took immediate steps to gratify the wish of the

holy man. Ambassadors were despatched to Rome to consult his Holiness Urban III. He sent Vivian, Cardinal Priest of Saint Sylvester de Monte Cœlio, to assist at the translation of the relics. The greatest preparations were made for this grand ceremony; the clergy and laity flocked from all parts of the country; and on the 9th of June, 1186, the relics were translated by the cardinal, in the presence of a vast assembly. There were fifteen bishops present, together with several abbots, priors, deans, and archdeacons. The ceremony was grand and imposing, and it made a lasting impression on the minds of those who witnessed it. The Feast of the Translation was ordered to be celebrated every year in the Irish Church, and an octave was prescribed for this festival, in order to add further solemnity to it.

The relics were enclosed in a monument or shrine; and the faithful placed many a

precious ornament on the tomb of the patrons of Erin. They remained for nearly four hundred years in the cathedral of Down, and no sacriligious hand attempted to violate what was deemed so holy. At length the reformers came, who had no more respect for sacred relics than the barbarous Danes who devastated the country some seven hundred years before. Some assert that the shrine was destroyed during the administration of Leonard Gray; O'Sullivan Berr (Decas Patri.); and others say that the relics were concealed by the Catholics lest they would be "irreverently and barbarously treated by the Reformers." "Postquam vero Angli, penes quos Ibernix administratio est, a divina Christi Dei lege cum Rege suo Henrico octavo deciverunt, horum divorum sacra corpora vel non inveniuntur vel ab Iberiis occultantur, ne a divorum contemptoribus Anglis irreverenter barbaramente temerentur."

It is not known into what hands the relics of Saint Bridget fell. But it is very probable that they were carefully guarded by some good old Irish priest, and carried to a place of safety. Of course England or Ireland could not furnish a place of security during those days of persecution. France was disturbed by religious dissensions. Germany was overrun by the disciples of Luther; Switzerland by the followers of Zuinglius. Catholic Belgium was covered with the blood of her hierarchy. No place could be found in these countries for objects of Catholic devotion. We may suppose the bearer of Saint Bridget's relics to journey on with fear and trembling till he comes to Austria. He travels still south till he comes to Neustadt or Neopolis, a small town south of Vienna on the borders of Hungary. Here we find the head of Saint Bridget most carefully preserved. Colgan and the Bollandists vouch for the genuineness

of this relic, although this is denied by others, as we shall see a little further on.

This relic remained in the church of Neustadt till the year 1587, when it was given, with several others, by Rodolph II., Emperor of Austria, to John Borgia, Spanish Legate at the court of Vienna. He brought them to Spain, and in honor of his father Saint Francis Borgia, he presented them to the Jesuits of Lisbon. They were translated to the Jesuits' Church with great solemnity on the 25th of January, 1588.

Other writers give a different account of the relics of Saint Bridget. Cordosus says that three Irish knights brought the head of Saint Bridget of Kildare to Dionysius, King of Lusitania. It was placed by his orders in the church of the Cistercian nuns at Lumiar, a small town a few miles from Lisbon. Dr. Burke (*Hib. Dom.*) says that he saw the head of St. Bridget in one of the chapels of their church.

Her office is chanted every year in the church on the 1st of February. And he moreover adds that outside the church door is a slab, inserted in the wall, with the following inscription, "In these three graves are interred the three Irish knights, who brought the head of the glorious Saint Bridget, who was born in Ireland, and whose relics are preserved in this chapel. The sodality of this glorious saint ordered this monument to be erected in memory of the event in the month of January, 1283."

As the head is the principal relic, it is almost certain that it was found by Saint Malachy, and placed in the monument with those of Saint Patrick and Saint Columbkil. Now if the claim of the nuns of Lumiar is admitted, we must conclude that the relics of the three great Irish saints did not remain in the cathedral of Down for a hundred years after their translation by Cardinal Vivian.

They were translated in the year 1186, and the monument was erected to the three Irish knights in 1283. We can assign no probable reason for this early removal of the relics of Saint Bridget, and indeed all the *à priori* reasons would render the whole account very doubtful. But then it may be said that no amount of reasoning can upset positive facts. But we can say in reply, that there were eight or nine saints of the name of Bridget in Ireland, and it may be the relic of one of these. I suppose they had little or no authority for believing it to be the head of St. Bridget of Kildare, except that of the three Irish knights; and it is impossible to say how far their testimony would go to make the thing credible.

But whatever may be said of these different statements, we may at least conclude that the fame of St. Bridget spread over the entire continent, and that her

virtues and merits were well known in Portugal during the thirteenth century. The Irish heart should not feel less tenderly towards her, or be less anxious to pay every possible mark of respect to her memory.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUPPRESSION OF RELIGIOUS HOUSES—REVIVAL OF THE BRIDGETINE ORDER IN IRELAND.

THE conventual system spread very rapidly in Ireland during the sixth and seventh centuries; and the fame of the Irish Religious Houses was well known over the entire Catholic Church. The weary stranger found a place of shelter, and the poor wanderer a home. The convent-gate was the resort of the poor; the pious inmates relieved their temporal wants, and with an alms they whispered words of consolation into their ears, holding forth bright promises to the faithful

followers of Him who hath not place to lay His head. The ignorant were instructed by the monks and nuns, and it would be hard indeed to find full-grown men and women who never heard of the true God or of the Redeemer of the human race. This state of things was reserved for the nineteenth century, when thousands of the English people, after three hundred years of enlightenment, would be found as ignorant of the first principles of the Christian religion as the African slave or the American savage. In the worst days of Ireland her people were never so ignorant—never so devoid of a knowledge of the saving truths of Christianity. They may not have known how to read or write, but they were well grounded in the truths of the Christian doctrine.

A great many of the religious houses were destroyed during the ninth and tenth centuries by the Northmen. Savage by

nature, and rendered more savage still by an insatiable desire for plunder, they spread sorrow and desolation over the country. Wherever they turned, the smoking ruins marked their path, and like the simoom, whatever they touched ceased to prosper. Religious houses and churches were plundered and then consigned to the flames; and many a young fervent Irish heart met an untimely grave beneath the smoldering ashes of a convent. It was hard for religious houses to spread and prosper in those days; and it was harder still to live contentedly in the hourly dread of being attacked by these marauders.

The English came in the twelfth century, and no very cordial love existed between them and the Irish. As far as the English rule extended, all Irish benefices of any worth were conferred on Englishmen; and the statutes of Kilkenny prohibited the appointment of any *mere* Irish

to any benefice. Several convents were founded by Englishmen, but their own countrymen filled the places of authority, and the same spirit of domineering crept into the solitude of the cloister. But still we had several Religious Houses in a most flourishing state during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and a great many of those old monasteries, whose ruins may be seen in all parts of the country, were built during this period.

Now a sad change comes over the land. The Reformation must reform the religious establishments of Ireland. Learning was cultivated in the Irish monasteries! But no matter; at the risk of ignorance, these houses must be dismantled. The poor were fed by the religious! No matter. The lands belonging to these religious must be given to some crouching minion of the court; and at the risk of causing starvation amongst the poor, this grant cannot be withheld. The monks reclaimed

those lands, and their tenantry lived happily under them! But these lands and these tenants must now be handed over to some spendthrift, who will spend the patrimony of the poor, and extract from this once happy tenantry the last farthing. The poor, who were supported by a few hundred acres of land in each parish, by the industry of the monks, must now be supported by a beggarly tenantry, and the worthless landlord will spend a thousand times more in useless luxuries than would make the poor and the tenantry happy and comfortable. But this is the reformed state of things—the work of enlightenment and progress. A poor law was never heard of in England and Ireland as long as the old monasteries prospered; but when these were swept away, the new occupants paid too much attention to the siren voice of pleasure to hearken to the voice of the starving poor. Of course, the new occupiers of the monastery

lands cut a greater show at church or meeting than the poor unassuming monks; but beyond the show, they conferred very little benefit on the community.

It is needless to recount the penalties to which Catholics were subjected during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and the early part of the eighteenth century. Priests were hunted like wild beasts, and a price fixed on their heads. No Catholic could hold any place of emolument or trust. No Catholic could teach school either publicly or privately, and every restriction was placed on Catholic education. We are accused of ignorance by the bigots of a domineering sect, but let them remember that the knowledge which Catholics possessed was acquired in spite of the penal statutes passed by their own enlightened brethren. Indeed, if Catholics would become perverts, they would be received with open arms, and supplied with food and clothing. If a Catholic child

asked a halfpenny from a well-dressed lady or gentleman, he could be forced to take up his quarters in the next charter school, where, being supplied with every requisite, he was taught the Protestant creed in all its purity, and, after a few years, sent out to sneer and scoff at the religion of his fathers.

It is hard for those who have been reared up in days of religious freedom to form an idea of what our Catholic forefathers had to suffer for the faith. No means were left untried for two hundred years, to root out Catholicity in Ireland; but as the blood of martyrs was the seed of believers, so these sufferings only made the Irish more attached to the faith of their fathers.

During the second half of the last century the penal statutes began to fall first into disuse, and then to be gradually repealed. The success of the American revolution loosed the first chain, and the

joy and the thanks of the poor captives were unbounded. The restrictions on Catholic education were partially removed in 1781, and from this forward Catholics began to breathe more freely and to enjoy some of that liberty for which they had so long yearned.

But it may be asked, did any religious houses exist in Ireland during these days of persecution? During the short respite in the reigns of Charles the Second and of James the Second, the religious of both sexes crowded into the country from all parts of Europe, and we find a convent of Dominican nuns in Galway during this period. Even when persecution was most violent, there were several religious houses in the country, and the religious, at the risk of their lives, administered the consolations of religion to the members of their respective congregations. They preserved the faith in Ireland, and, when secular priests were obliged to swear at

their ordination that they would not desert their missions without the permission of their superiors, these religious stood firmly and braved every danger. It would be easy to cite illustrious examples; but the fact is so well known that it requires no lengthened proof.

When the restrictions on Catholic education were removed, we find the Catholic Bishops taking immediate steps to provide for the religious education of their flocks. Dr. Moylan, Bishop of Cork, obtained an approval of the rules and constitutions of the Presentation Order from Pius VI., in the year 1791. The nuns of this order were obliged to visit the sick at first; but after some time they were exonerated from this duty, and the order was approved and confirmed by Pius VII. Houses of this order were founded in the early part of this century, and it has continued to spread steadily up to the present time.

One of the principal duties of the Presentation nuns is the education of the poor; no work can be more meritorious, and no work could be more faithfully discharged than this work has been by this pious sisterhood for the last sixty years. Full of the spirit of their state, they devote their lives to the solid instruction of those who are most destitute and most liable to be neglected. The work has prospered in their hands, and I trust that the same spirit will always exist amongst them, and that the order will continue to prosper as it has done up to the present time.

Some of the Irish bishops wished to extend the field of their labors, and to embrace more objects of charity within the sphere of action of the nuns, than were contemplated by the framers of the constitutions of the Presentation Order. Opportunities of education should be afforded to the rich, and the adult female poor should be instructed. Dr. Delany, Bishop

of Kildare, endeavored to establish a congregation that would accomplish these three ends. The two first, the education of the rich and poor, could be easily attained; but it was not so easy to attain the third, the instruction of the female adult poor. In order to secure this very desirable object, he included the parish chapel within the inclosure, and made the instruction of the adult female poor one of the fundamental laws of this new congregation. His next step was to secure some pious females who would carry out his praiseworthy designs, and who would devote themselves in earnest to their own salvation and to the objects of the congregation. After a very short time he succeeded in securing the requisite number, and the first convent of Bridgetine nuns was founded in Tullow, County Carlow, in the year 1807; a second house was founded in Mountrath in 1809; a third in Abbeyleix in 1842; and a fourth in Gores-

bridge in 1858. The rules of this institute have undergone various changes, and at present the rules and constitutions of the Presentation Order have been adopted as far as is consistent with the nature of the institute.

Nothing can exceed the piety and charity of the nuns of the order of Saint Bridget. They follow closely in the footsteps of their holy patroness, and devote their lives to the acquisition of every Christian virtue and to the instruction of the poor. Their holy founder, by consigning to their care the instruction of the female poor, opened a great field for their zeal and piety. It is no unusual thing to see a number of poor women collected around one of these sisters in the chapel on Sundays, shedding tears of sorrow for some past faults, or tears of gratitude for some past favors. The burning words of charity, falling from the lips of the pious sisters, sink deeply into the hearts of these

poor creatures, and fill their souls with confidence and love. If any religious order in Ireland deserves our especial esteem, it is certainly the order of Saint Bridget, for its object is most solid and its success in every case most astonishing. And if experience can attest the value of any institution, ask those who have the special care of those people in whose parishes the convents of Saint Bridget have been founded. They will tell you that no body of religious could effect a greater amount of good with a less degree of ostentation. They are not anxious to make known their good actions to the world only inasmuch as they promote the glory of God by bringing back to His love those who may have wandered, or by guarding those who still remain faithful.

On the feast of Saint Bridget, the nuns of her order make a solemn dedication of themselves to the Blessed Virgin, holding lighted tapers in their hands. Here we

find the devotion of the brightest days of the Irish Church; we find the names of the Blessed Virgin and Saint Bridget united, claiming the respect and veneration of those pious virgins, who endeavor to walk in their footsteps. The same spirit animates the nuns of Saint Bridget now as animated her earliest followers. And when we remember the virtues of Saint Bridget, shall we for a moment be surprised at the devotedness of her spiritual daughters? She watches over them; and her bright example has brought many a soul to sanctity. She leads the way when weaker hearts falter; she inspires with courage when all the world seems to rise up in temptation. It is a glorious thing to fight under the shadow of her protection; it is a sign of certain victory to stand closely by her side. Whenever the nuns of her order wish for protection, let them fly to Saint Bridget. Whenever they wish for counsel, let them invoke her

intercession. Whenever they want a guide, let them call on their protectress. Whenever they wish for encouragement, let them remember her laborious life. In her they will find every thing that can be desired as a model, as a protectress, as a kind and a loving friend.

They can make the virtues of Saint Bridget known to the poor, "the dearest friends of God;" and that they have done so, and will do so, is a fact that cannot be questioned by any one who has any knowledge of the spirit of their order. I hope that they will always continue the same useful career, bringing souls to God and advancing daily in perfection.

The nuns of the other Religious Orders in Ireland should be as devout to Saint Bridget as the nuns of her own order. She is the foundress of the convents of nuns in Ireland, and she is their special patroness. She is a model of the conventual life; she is a bright and shining star;

she has gone forward, pointing out the way to all who value the things of God more than the things of this world.

Those who minister at the altar should also remember the fervor of the old Irish priests, and how devoted they were to Saint Bridget. They proclaimed her praises over the entire world, and they exhorted all who heard them to rely on her protection. The same spirit should animate the Irish priest of the nineteenth century, and he should be as anxious to make the virtues of Saint Bridget as well known to the Irish people as a Malachy or a Virgil.

The young ecclesiastic should acquire a tender devotion towards "the Mary of Erin" during his college course, that, being convinced of her claims on our veneration and love, he would go forth full of holy zeal, and make her virtues known to those over whom she watches with a maternal care. It was thus the

ecclesiastics of the seventh and eighth centuries prepared for the great work of converting the barbarous nations of Europe.

In a word, Saint Bridget has special claims on every Irish heart. She should hold the next place in our affections to Mary, the Mother of God. She held this place in the palmy days of the Irish Church; and as devotion to them will increase, those days of happiness and joy will again return. The fond heart loves and labors; and where the tepid fail, the fervent succeed. I hope a happy time is yet destined to shine on the Irish Church, when the love of Mary and Bridget will go hand in hand, and draw down those special blessings on the Irish Church, which will make her children dear to God, and fill her missionaries with the spirit of those holy men who made known the gospel to the barbarian, and earned for our country the name of the "Isle of Saints."

NOVEVA TO SAINT BRIDGET.

O GLORIOUS Saint Bridget! the brightest ornament of the Irish Church, and the foundress of Irish convents! behold me prostrate before you, claiming your protection, and soliciting your special care. You were specially raised up by a merciful Providence to propagate the faith in Ireland, and to lead many to a most perfect renunciation of every worldly comfort for the sake of your Heavenly Spouse. You practised the most perfect counsels of the Gospel, and walked steadily forward when human nature trembled—when human strength would have failed. You sacrificed all for the sake of your Jèsus, and you never felt more happy than when in

His company. Behold me now before you, begging of you to sustain my faltering steps—to guide me in the ways of virtue. Obtain for me the object of this novena. Obtain for me an angelic purity. Watch over my eyes, my tongue, my ears; guard every sense; ward off every danger; and preserve my heart pure and holy. Obtain for me the virtue of holy obedience. Let me always sacrifice my own will to the will of my God; let me always obey with a willing heart those who have been appointed to rule over me. Detach my heart from the things of this world. Let me use its goods as the means of salvation; and let me not sacrifice my salvation to its deceitful vanities. Obtain for me a great love of Jesus and Mary. Obtain for me the grace to place myself in spirit at the feet of my crucified Jesus, and there to bewail my many transgressions. When dangers threaten, when temptations crowd upon me, when the

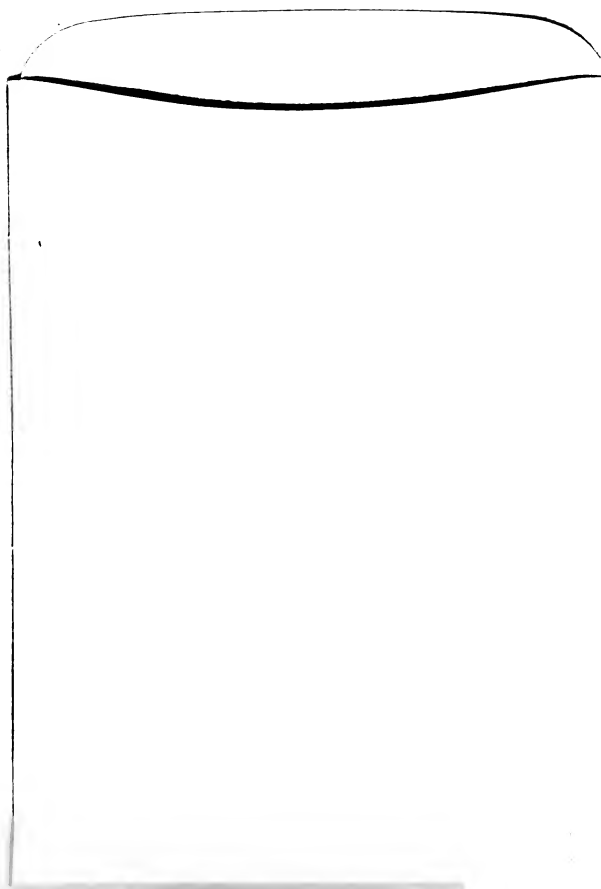
world and the Devil conspire to darken the brightness of my soul, do then defend—do then watch over me. Obtain for me a great love of God and a great love of my neighbor, that I may love God for His own sake, and my neighbor for God alone. Obtain for me the grace to bear the crosses of this life with Christian patience, and to remember the sufferings of my dearest Jesus. Obtain for me a profound humility, which teaches us what we are and what we should esteem ourselves to be. Obtain for me the grace to bear with the faults of those around me, and to remember how much others must endure from me. Obtain for me a spirit of meekness and gentleness, a great contempt for the vain applause of men, and a great zeal for the salvation of souls. You loved to remain near Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament; and obtain for me to fly to Him in all my trials, temptations and dangers. Look down on the Irish Church, its bish-

ops and priests, and especially on those devoted females who have left all this world holds dear for the sake of God. Look down on all the religious orders, especially on that order which has taken thee for its especial protectress. Obtain for us all the gift of final perseverance, and every other grace and blessing which we require. Watch over us, O glorious Saint Bridget! Bring us safely through the dangers of this life; and obtain for us the grace to be one day united with thee in Heaven, where we shall sing for endless ages the praises of that God who died to save us, and who watches over us with a parent's care. O Mother of God! do thou also watch us, and as you defended Bridget by your prayers, defend us also. Grant us, dear Jesus, every grace and every blessing, that, after our mortal pilgrimage, we may enjoy thy company, with Mary and Bridget, for ever in Heaven. Amen.

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